

**THE MAN WHO MARRIED FOR
MONEY**

The Man Who Married for Money

A Love Story

BY
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NEW YORK
CHELSEA HOUSE
PUBLISHERS

The Man Who Married for Money

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THE MAN WHO MARRIED FOR MONEY

CHAPTER I

THE MISUNDERSTANDING

YOU make me feel like a sport, bringing me home like this!" laughed Nancy Leigh as she climbed from the big gray limousine, the appearance of which in the drab street created no little sensation.

The man in the car caught and held the small, trimly gloved hand she put out to him. His handsome face flushed and his eyes rested on the girl with hungry intentness.

"I've been very proud to do it, Nancy," he said. "I only wish I could see a lot more of you. Soon you must come for a regular spin with me," he went on in a wheedling tone. "Say you will, Nancy!"

She pulled her hand away, ever so gently.

"Thanks, Mr. Benton, but—I'm so busy, you know!" she rejoined with a smile, and, with a quick little breath and crimson color darting into creamy cheeks, she turned from him and fled across the sidewalk and in at the gate opposite which they had stopped.

As the big car lurched forward and moved away, Nancy burst into the tiny sitting room on the ground floor and came to a sudden mystified stop.

She stood for a long moment framed in the doorway, a slim, upright little figure with all the grace of

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budding womanhood, her darkly blue eyes, wide and startled, and her clustering red-gold hair making a vivid patch of color in the fading light.

"You—John!" she gasped.

He was standing by the window—a giant of a man, strong and taut, with powerful shoulders and well-poised head that reminded one of men who wield the hammer and the anvil in the glow of furnace fires. His chin had a hard, granite cast, and the keen gray eyes he fixed on the girl were angry and accusing.

"Yes, I am here," he said. "And I saw!"

"John!" She came quickly up to him, her heart racing with bewilderment and fear. "What do you mean?"

"Where have you been?" he flashed. "You knew I was coming, didn't you? And, instead——"

"I knew you were coming, yes, but——" Nancy checked the explanation that was on her lips. Her face became white and pinched as, with bitterness, she realized that John Grant distrusted her.

"Nancy, do you think it fair?" he went on. His voice softened for a moment and he tried to pull her gently toward him. "You know it isn't the first time I've seen you with—with that man Benton."

Nancy evaded him. Her pride had been sorely touched. She faced him with blue eyes that flashed with disdain and defiance.

"Mr. Benton is at least—a gentleman!" she stormed, crushing back her tears.

"I see!" Grant said in a hard tone. "And I—well."

Nancy looked at him in mute appeal. As soon as the words had left her lips, she wanted to take them back. An impulse seized her to run into John's arms and tell him how sorry she was.

But he seemed willfully bent on misunderstanding her. He picked up his cap.

"Since it's that way, Nancy," he went on coldly, "you'd be better rid of the likes of me."

Nancy wavered. It was all so trivial. John worked at the big yard down the river—Fenwick's—where she herself was employed. He was the backbone of the place, the foreman; she, a stenographer in the office that overlooked the workshops and the "slips" and the towering piles that hedged big ships in the making.

John knew that James Fenwick was ill and that, as the private secretary of the boss, she had been going to his palatial home in the suburbs to take important letters. That night as she had been detained and, anxious to get back to meet John, she had accepted the invitation of Lionel Benton, Fenwick's nephew, to run her back in his big gray racer.

That was all. A word, a look even, might have made things clear and brought John Grant impulsively to her side. But Nancy was feeling the hurt, the disillusionment. It seemed suddenly that, since John's trust was broken, his love for her could not be the deep, enduring thing she had believed it.

"If you think of me that way, John—you had better go," she answered.

She looked at him with a flash in her gray-blue eyes, but there was that in their misty depths, in the

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little quiver at her lips, that made John Grant pause involuntarily as he went past her to the door.

"Nancy," he said more softly, with a world of appeal, "why did you keep me waiting here while you were running around with that fellow?"

"I might have told you, but now I won't!" she answered with a stifled sob.

"Very well," he went on with a sigh. "I'll look in again on Thursday, as usual. Perhaps you'll think better of it then, Nancy."

"I won't. And I don't think I ever want to see you again, John Grant!" she cried in a tempest of emotion.

She watched him go. He did not once look back. It was his way.

Grant had not gone far before the fires that had burned within him smoldered out. His love for Nancy, his faith in her, spoke with sudden sharpness, calling him a fool.

He disliked Lionel Benton. That Benton's wealth and position might fascinate his little sweetheart for the minute, he thought possible, but he knew in his heart that Nancy would never succumb to the lure of money.

He had been a fool, and he was sorry. But men like Grant do not like to own up to any folly, and, his brows drawn, he went on with firm, determined step.

Nancy might have explained. She knew well enough that he hated to see her with Benton. And her gibe, that this "gentleman" was all that he could never hope to be, still rankled.

"We'll see on Thursday!" he decided eventually, the storm of jealousy that had seized him wearing off. He laughed to himself softly, hopefully.

Threading his way into the mean and gloomy streets leading toward the river, Grant stopped at length before a poor little house in an ill-lit alley.

He knocked and waited.

Soon came the patter of eager feet, and when the door was pushed open, he reached down to take a curly-headed mite of a girl into his arms. The little girl's very small brother came to cling to his leg, impeding his progress into the poor but neatly kept kitchen beyond.

Grant's brother's widow had been expecting him. Friday was pay day at the yard, and he always came to see her on that night. The main object of these visits only Mary Grant herself knew.

She had protested often, since Grant had his parents to support and, free with his money at all times, his approaching marriage to Nancy Leigh must be urging him to close his purse strings. But he knew how far money goes when there are kiddies to keep, and when he went away Mary found the usual large bill on the mantelpiece.

In the company of little Maisie and her brother, John Grant's kindly nature found its vent, and, for a time, he almost forgot the rift with Nancy.

Leaving the little home at length, the brooding light came back to his eyes. As he cut through a drab side street in the factory quarter, he saw the office in which Arthur Leigh, Nancy's brother was employed.

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Presently Grant stood looking at the place. The office windows made a dull patch of light against the stretch of grimy brick wall. Arthur was probably working late; he often was there alone, long after the other men had gone, Grant reflected, and, since he could not reach up to look in at the windows, he turned to the door.

The door opened at his touch and, struck by the quiet, he went down the passage and came to the door, slightly ajar, that opened into the cashier's office.

John checked the salutation that rose to his lips.

Arthur stood under the glare of light, close by the safe, which was wide open. In his trembling hands he held a wad of notes; his thin, pale face looked haggard, his eyes wide with fear. Oblivious to all but the temptation before him, he still hesitated.

"Hello, my lad!"

Grant's face was hard and his eyes steely and accusing as he stepped into the office. He did not need to see the bills drop from young Leigh's hands to know that he had no right to touch them, that the money and the safe were not under his charge.

"Put that money back!"

Arthur was shaking. He tried to smile, to deny that he had any evil intent. But he could not deceive John Grant.

The boy broke down.

"It—it's true," he confessed. "I meant to take the money."

"Why?" Into Grant's eyes crept an expression

that mingled pity with contempt. "Why?" he repeated sternly.

"Oh, it's the same old story!" cried Nancy's brother. "An unlucky bet—that's all."

"In spite of your last promise?" thundered Grant. "You fool! When I gave you a lift the last time, Arthur, I meant it to be that—the *last time*. You can't impose on people like this, no more'n you can expect to get yourself out of a hole backing horses. I warned you."

"Oh, I know!" grumbled the other, but he checked the impulse to tell Grant to stop preaching. He knew the older man too well. In spite of his present rage, he was "soft" for he was Nancy's sweetheart!

"I suppose I must face the music," he went on with a show of bravado. "It will mean—prison!"

"Prison would do you good!" growled Grant. "How much is it? Whose money was it?" he fired suddenly.

Arthur tried to hide his elation.

"It's big this time—near three hundred dollars," he answered with bent head. "It was Joe Hartley's money—money I had collected for him."

"I'm surprised a man like Joe would trust you," said Grant.

"Anyhow, he did—and this is the result!" flung out Arthur sullenly.

"Does Joe know you have squandered his money?"

"He suspects. He gave me till to-morrow."

Grant was in difficulties. It was a big sum for him—about all of his savings. But he was thinking less of the ne'er-do-well before him than of Nancy.

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To let matters drift until the next day would bring the sordid story to the girl's ears, and then——

"D'you know, if—if I should help you out of this, my lad, it means ruin almost!" he broke out bitterly. Arthur was silent, and John gripped at the young man's arm. "D'you hear? It means that Nancy and I'll have to wait weeks and months longer."

"I don't want your money, Grant," broke from Leigh in contrition.

"Yes, but you know darned well you'll get it all the same! I'll see you to-morrow at dinner time outside the yard," he went on. "But, mind you, if you get stuck like this again——"

Arthur almost wept with relief.

"On my honor, I'll go straight after this, Grant," he said as he wrung the other's big, hard hand. "You're a gentleman, and—and I won't forget it."

"There, that's the spirit!" muttered Grant as he strode away.

He drew the money from the bank next day and, knowing the struggle to begin all over again, he left with a bitter sigh. But he was saving Nancy, he reflected, and if she knew she would be grateful. She would never know, but that did not matter. They could afford to wait, so he told himself cheerfully. But later the shabbiness of it all, his utter poverty, was borne in upon him, and his big heart almost failed him.

CHAPTER II

DECEIVED

THE next afternoon he stood surveying Fenwick's Yard. He loved being part of the big place with its clattering workshops and its great ships in the building and its hive of strong men. Sometimes he prided himself on being above the others, on having done a shade more than his mates to make Fenwick's what it was—a power in the industrial machinery of the nation. Old James Fenwick had singled him out often for praise, and long before his due time he had been made foreman of the great machine shops.

In the yard he was some one of consequence; out of it, rubbing shoulders with the rest of the world—nobody!

While he was still outside the shop, with his strong arms and his great broad chest bared to the breeze, Grant turned suddenly to find the eyes of a girl upon him.

She was a tall, stately creature with a wealth of dark hair, and eyes that glowed like still pools under a night sky; a girl of arresting beauty who looked oddly out of place in the smoke and strife of that big place of industry.

Lucy Fenwick came often to her father's place, and the frequency of her visits increased while he

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himself was unable to come. It was said that the old man's daughter—his only child—knew every detail of the giant business and was no small power in its management.

Grant flushed under his grime. As he expected, Miss Fenwick came up to question him. His answers were ready. The big chief's daughter's interest in the yard never impressed him; rather was he filled with a fine contempt. He saw only a slip of a girl—one whom accident had made mistress of a million and the heiress of Fenwick's Yard.

Lucy's pale, beautiful face held a faint flush and it was seldom that her dark eyes risked meeting Grant's. Before him, she was a woman with a woman's emotions.

"I hope your father is improving?" asked the foreman respectfully.

"I wish I could say yes to that, John Grant," was her answer, and, reminded of an ordeal that might lie before her, her eyes were lifted to his earnest face, almost in appeal. "My father has not forgotten you," she went on more quickly. "He was talking to me about you only yesterday."

"Tell him we want him back at the yard," said John gratefully. Of all the men he knew James Fenwick was the greatest.

He watched Lucy leave in her huge gray limousine with the liveried chauffeur at the wheel.

"Soon she'll be worth millions!" was Grant's bitter reflections as he turned into the dark of a shed where furnace fires and white-hot steel made fantastic shadows. "And I——"

Ambition stirred within him, but his widest horizon seemed the happiness of his parents and those he loved—and Nancy Leigh. Only to be able to call Nancy his own——

Grant could afford to smile. To-morrow night he would call again on his Nancy, and there were no obstacles so great that a word, or even a look, could not overcome them. He would tell Nancy he had been a fool, and that would be the end of it. She would come to him fast enough, her soft arms clasped about his neck and her warm, red lips seeking his.

He looked for her on the following morning when it was time for her to arrive at the office, but she contrived to evade him.

Joe Hartley, who worked in a neighboring shop, came to question him. Hartley was big and florid. He looked Grant up and down from narrowed lids.

"One thing I want to ask you, John," he began. "Don't happen to have been tossing your money about, eh?"

"Tell me exactly what you're driving at, then I'll answer!" was Grant's retort.

"Well, I expect it's you I've got to thank for the fifty bucks I got out of Nancy Leigh's brother?"

"Fifty?" echoed Grant, and his brows clouded. "It was more than that, surely?"

"Should have been between two and three hundred," said Hartley in rising disgust. "I've been done by that young hound, and you've gone throwing your good money away as usual!" Hartley raised his voice for the benefit of other men in the

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vicinity. "You're a big fool, John Grant! Everybody thinks you soft; you're taken advantage of right and left. You forget you've sweated for every cent you've thrown away. Look at me! I live in my own shack, and I've got other property besides. I've got a good bit in the bank for a rainy day. And why? Because I've the sense to look at both sides of every cent before I part with it!"

Grant's face was ashen, but he was thinking less of the man before him than of Arthur who had broken his word. And Nancy!

"Thanks, Joe!" he managed to say. "These may be your ideas, but the world would be a bum place if everybody else shared 'em. It's my money, after all, and I can spend it as I please!"

Lucy Fenwick was busy in the study at Woodlands, the Fenwicks' beautiful home, which was set back in its grounds just outside of the city.

Her face was white and tense as she pondered over the note she penned. Over and over again she destroyed her efforts and started afresh. She had at last completed her task and, inscribing the envelope "Mr. John Grant," had rung for a servant, when a tap at the door preceded the entrance of her cousin, Lionel Benton.

"Well, how goes it, Lucy?" was his greeting. "I thought probably you had gone to the yard—and I wanted to talk to you."

"About what?" she questioned absently.

To the servant who had admitted Benton, she

handed the letter addressed to Grant, with instructions that it was to be sent immediately.

Benton crossed the room to stand awkwardly by the wide bay window.

"I hardly know if I dare tell you," he said after a pause. Lucy did not show much concern, so he seemed relieved to be able to inquire first for his uncle. Her father was a little better, the girl informed him.

"I hope you won't think me selfish," Benton gathered courage to go on, "but I'm—well, terribly interested in that girl, Nancy Leigh, who comes here so often from the office."

Lucy turned sharp eyes upon him. The color left her face, but in an instant it was sweeping back again.

"You mean——"

"The truth is, I can't get Nancy Leigh out of my head," he went on in a tone of appeal. "She's a fine girl and—and I'm afraid I've fallen in love."

Lucy laughed, a nervous little laugh, that rang with sudden elation.

"But I heard that Nancy Leigh is in love with some one else—one of the foremen in the yard," she said quickly.

"I know. Grant is his name," nodded Benton. "That's the rub. He's only a workman though and I thought—well, that she might jump at the chance of doing better!"

Lucy moved nearer and caught at his arm. Her dark eyes were wide and shining, her red lips for a

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moment tightly compressed. Then she spoke again, almost fiercely.

"She will never marry John Grant—never, never!" she said. "And if I were a man, and if I wanted a girl, nothing would stand in my way." A little laugh escaped her. "Can't you see that she must be eager for the chance, that she's only trying to make sure of you?"

"I think not," said Benton. "Nancy seems above that sort of thing." He looked at his cousin keenly.

"Nancy Leigh is like the rest of them," Lucy declared. "She isn't a fool. And"—she paused a moment thoughtfully before going on—"yes, I'll help you. I'll give you a chance this very evening to prove what I say! Will that please you?"

"You mean——"

"That I shall have Nancy Leigh out here to-night, so that you can see her alone!"

Nancy could hardly get through the last of her correspondence. Click, click, click went her machine in a frenzied effort to avoid being late; every other minute she was looking at the hands of the big office clock.

Thursday and John Grant!

He would be sure to call for her as he usually did; he had said that he would call. She would be angry with him and hold her head very high and refuse to have anything to do with him, but she would be folded in his arms all the same, and, when he asked her forgiveness, she was sure to cry and

tell him that there was nothing to forgive and that she had been very silly!

It had just struck five when the telephone bell rang. Nancy started when she heard that the call was for her.

"Can you come out within the hour, Miss Leigh?" came the voice of Lucy Fenwick. "Father would like to attend to one or two important matters."

"Certainly—I'll come right away," said Nancy.

It was a bitter disappointment. That night she had hoped to make up for a good deal, and John was sure to wait for her and wonder. But she dared not refuse.

She lost no time. She went home first and left a message that, if John called he was to be told that she had gone to Mr. Fenwick's, but that she meant to hurry back.

It was quite a walk to the trolley stop nearest the house, with a good hard walk after that, but Nancy turned in at the gates well within the hour.

As she came in sight of the front of the house her heart raced a little, for she saw Lionel Benton. The man met her at the big front door.

"Mr. Fenwick is not so well," said he, after greeting her. He did not venture more, for Lucy herself appeared.

"Oh, I am sorry, Miss Leigh," she explained, "but my father is hardly ready for you. Perhaps he won't be able to attend to any business after all. But would you mind waiting a little?" Lucy did not give the girl time to respond, but turned hastily to her cousin. "Perhaps you will show Miss Leigh where

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the gardens are, Lionel? It will be cooler there than inside. I shall send word presently, Miss Leigh," she added to Nancy.

Benton was already leading the way and talking to her pleasantly.

They went around the huge pile of the Fenwicks' home and across a stretch of lawn to where a picturesque summerhouse broke in on a line of tree and hedge and gave a vista of the flowering garden beyond. Nancy showed a disinclination to go any farther, and Benton faced her with a sudden show of uneasiness.

"Nancy," he began after a pause, "I'm glad I have this chance of speaking to you alone."

She looked at him with wide, startled eyes.

"But why, Mr. Benton?" she found courage to say.

"Just—just because I have always wanted to say something particularly important to you, Nancy," he said. "You are so elusive, you know! The first time I saw you out here I thought you were one of—one of Lucy's friends. You fit in a place like this, Nancy. A girl like you should not be cooped up all day in a place like Fenwick's. I hate to think of you being wasted like that."

"I am perfectly happy, thank you!"

He came nearer to her.

"You might be a great deal happier, Nancy," he went on in a low tone of appeal. "I feel I could make you happier, and I want the chance, little girl——"

She shot a frightened look at him, but in the

passion of his longing, blinded also by his vanity, he did not see her fear. She was so close to him that he caught her faint fragrance, saw the swift rise and fall of her young bosom, the warm, delicate tints at her throat and neck, and suddenly his arms went about her, and like a fluttering bird at first, too afraid to move, she lay panting on his breast.

"Please, please!"

With a wild effort, Nancy tore herself free. She stood for a moment very still, panting for breath. Then, knowing that they were within sight of the house and arrested by a sudden noise, her eyes flashed affrightedly toward one of the French windows on the first floor.

The window had been thrown open and, on the balcony, his eyes upon her, stood John Grant!

CHAPTER III

JOHN GRANT'S BITTERNESS

GRANT returned to the drawing-room just as the door opened on Lucy.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," said the girl.

His face was like a mask, his big hands clenched by his sides, and for a long moment he did not seem to notice her presence.

Lucy's own face was expressionless. That her plans had not miscarried, she saw. It was good, good!

She came nearer to Grant, her dark, adoring eyes fixed on his face. And, meeting her gaze suddenly, he realized the girl's feeling for him.

"I—I am sorry," he mumbled. A flush burned in his cheeks, a strange stir came to his heart.

In a soft, clinging, pale-blue gown, with a diamond twinkling in the dusky shadows of her hair, she looked very beautiful and queenly, too lovely to be so near to him and to look at him as he had seen her look. His pulses leaped.

Her look changed to sadness.

"Father is very, very ill," she said with a quiver in her voice. "But I spoke to him, John—John Grant. I told him you were here." Then she lifted her head again and, timidly, her small, white hand

went out to touch his. "But we have settled a certain matter. I have news for you, Mr. Grant. The assistant manager's place at the yard is vacant, and it is father's wish that you take it."

Grant caught his breath.

"Assistant manager—me!" he said huskily. The jump seemed too fantastic to be true. It was a gentleman's job, and it made the incredible seem possible.

She laughed softly at his amazement—a laugh of elation and of triumph.

"You are to be assistant manager," she said. "And soon you may go higher still! But"—and into her voice crept a note of entreaty—"you must think more of yourself, Mr. Grant. Don't stay in a rut. Never be content—and whatever you desire will be yours for the asking!"

Her hand fluttered to his again and, for a long moment, he pressed it fiercely. Her dark eyes met his, and there was that in their liquid depths that made a pulse drum at his temples.

"I shan't forget!" he said.

But when he went down the great sweep of the staircase and out at the door, the flush had left his face, and his heart felt dead. He again looked white and hard as steel, with his fists doubled up and his brows making uncanny shadows about his eyes.

Nancy Leigh was just outside, waiting.

In the mad tumult following the scene with Benton, it seemed the only thing to do—to run away from the man who had thus compromised her and seek Grant. Benton had followed, wild with appeal

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and asking her forgiveness; but Nancy did not see him. She saw nothing, cared for nothing or nobody—only that she might make John Grant understand. He stopped and glared at her, with a curl of scorn on his mouth, and then he went on.

“John!” His name came fluttering to her quivering lips, and her tearful face made a moving appeal. She put out a shaking hand to him.

He was merciless. He went on, passed her by as he might a disreputable stranger, and, dazed with the emotions that swept her, Nancy saw him disappear.

Even when he had left the girl far behind, Grant’s anger did not lessen. He thrust all thought of her away as he would something that was past and done with; and instead, fitting in with his mood, came the exultant reflection of the revenge that would be his.

Next to the manager, he would be the most important man at Fenwick’s! Assistant manager, with a thousand souls at his command; no longer a mere machine, but a living, breathing power! Nobody would credit it.

But soon enough they would see—Joe Hartley and Arthur Leigh and all who had taken advantage of his good nature and scoffed at him. Yes, and Nancy!

Grant reached his home. His mother looked up to smile at him, for there was none so proud of John as she. In an outer room, his father tinkered with a mechanical toy—one of the “ideas” that was to make their fortune.

“Ah, there you are, John!” he hailed him. “Guess I’ve got something out of this new carburetor. We

must fix up a real shipshape model, you and I. Twenty-five or thirty dollars——”

Grant was still on his feet, his giant figure towering high in the low room.

“No!” he shouted, the black frown on his brows again. “Not another cent will you get out of me for your mad old contraptions! I’ve been fooled and imposed on right and left. People call me soft. Well, I’m taking darned good care they’ve seen the last of my soft side! You may as well know it. I’m assistant manager now at the yard. Oh, yes, it’s true! And I’m through, I say, with the old, hopeless grind. I’ve just about touched the bottom making shift for other folks. Now, I’m going out for Number One for a change, and you can take my oath on it!”

Grant stuck by his word.

Within a week he found himself installed in his own private office at the rear of the block of offices and with a window from which he could survey the giant activities of the yard. The novelty of the change was fresh upon him. He disliked his new suit and his white collar; he felt clumsy and awkward, and he knew that the men he had formerly labored with laughed at his assumption of dignity.

But they would not laugh long, he decided. He would stand by the window gazing out upon the men and machinery and, with a tight jaw, sizing up the wealth and the power they represented.

“Whatever you desire will be yours for the asking,” Lucy Fenwick had said.

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Grant thrilled. He was like a man who had awakened from a lazy dream. He reflected on what other men set out to accomplish, what James Fenwick had achieved, step by step, before he made the yard what it was. And might not he do the same?

Ambition stirred in him, the lust for power and wealth and fame. He had already made a big jump, and Lucy's words, in the nature of a prophecy, came like rich wine to urge him on.

Once or twice he was conscious of an inner jolt. Something told him that he was wrong, that this was not the way of happiness.

Somewhere up above him, the click-click of a typewriter reminded him that Nancy Leigh was near. She had avoided him. He wanted once more to fling his scorn in her face, to flaunt before her his new power and the great chance she might have shared with him.

The thought of her persistently called to him, but he shut out the emotions that kept leaping within him; he told himself that his love had been dishonored, that this girl belonged to the past of which he had shorn himself.

Other thoughts had come. He looked forward to Lucy Fenwick's visits with a kind of awe. There was something in her dark eyes that made him feel that her words were true: he would wield still greater power, and whatever he desired might be his.

Suddenly the crisis was upon him. Word came over the wire at night that James Fenwick had passed away. While it was still early on the following day, his daughter, the new owner of Fenwick's Yard,

stood in Grant's office with but one meaning in the shining, tear-filled eyes she turned upon him.

Grant had felt the blow. Without Mr. Fenwick, the yard could never be the same; his respect for the boss had amounted to adoration. He had been cast down, but, standing by his window, dwelling on the news, other thoughts had come flashing over him.

He saw the added power that might be his, greater achievement still, wealth and dominion and—yes, with it all, a greater chance of forgetfulness!

Only a slip of a girl stood between him and the fulfillment of his dream, and—Grant admitted it to himself in a sort of triumphant whisper—that girl loved him.

In her black dress Lucy Fenwick looked frail and ghostly, like a child seeking refuge from a great fear. She tried to smile at him, but, with a broken little sob instead, she came up to him and he took both her hands.

"I—I had to come, John!" she whispered through quivering lips.

"Need I say how sorry I am?" He tried to get a grip of himself. He *was* sorry, he pitied her, but in that tense moment the inner voice that clamored to be heard was warning him of his peril.

She was trembling. Her beautiful dark head was bent and so close to him that it almost rested on his shoulder.

"I had no idea it could be so terrible, John," she went on, lifting her white face again. "I feel so afraid and—and, oh, I want you, John—just you!"

For one tense moment a hot flush burned in her

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cheeks, then, with a broken little cry, she was sinking against Grant's broad breast. And, with mad emotion in his heart, blind to all else but her nearness, and his triumph, his arms went comfortingly about her.

"Poor little girl!" he murmured. "I know—I understand."

CHAPTER IV

THE INNER VOICE

FOR a long moment Grant held the girl in silence. The wonder of her words left him dazed. A flush spread through the hardened lines of his face, and his heart leaped at the greatness of the opportunity the fates held out to him.

He did not realize it at the time, but Lucy herself was almost forgotten. She clung to him, strangely comforted, content only to find his arms about her, dazed with the joy of having won him, of knowing that her self-revelation had not been in vain.

Grant was mindful only of what she represented to him. Fantastically the prospect of the future danced before his dazzled eyes. A few minutes before, with the news of Fenwick's death, he had envied Lucy. A wild ambition had stirred in his veins—indeed, so wild had it seemed that he had to thrust it from him with a laugh at his madness.

Now it was not only possible, but it was coming true.

With an effort he collected himself and held the flushed, trembling girl at arm's length.

"You're upset. You don't know what you're saying!" His will under better control, other thoughts and other feelings rose to taunt him with the impossibility of it all.

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"John! You don't know how happy you have made me," she answered, her shining eyes meeting his. "I have loved you from the first. I wanted you long ago!"

He still stared at her, fighting back the cry of another voice that told him that he must regret his words and the step he was going to take.

"But your friends—what will they think?" he said.

"I am not considering my friends, dear," she told him, in a way that suggested that she had already taken the barrier of class into account. "In time they will be proud of you, as I am proud and happy. And you, John, will you be happy, too?"

Her tone was eager and tremulous as she searched his thoughtful face with vague anxiety. Was he thinking of the other girl, Nancy Leigh—beginning so soon to regret? She sought to feel that he was hers beyond recall.

"John, dear, you won't regret?" she went on.

He laughed shortly, flinging back his head.

"What would I have to regret?" he said. It was like a challenge to himself—to the John Grant of old. "It looks rather as if I am to have all the credit side of the account. A few days back I was only a humble workman. You made me assistant manager. That was a big enough lift, I thought. And now you would make me a gentleman! I am wondering if I can carry off the part!"

"I'm sure you can, John!" she encouraged him. His eyes glistened as he looked away from her for a

moment, his strong chin squared and the flush deepening in his cheeks.

"I believe I can!" he said, with a ring of certainty. He saw the power that would be thrust into his hands—the step ahead to still greater things—the fulfillment of ambitions that so recently had been but a dream. "I'll make you proud of me!" he added.

"Ah, I know, you are so strong," she whispered. Her head came down again to his broad breast. "But it's just you, just your love, John, that I want!"

They were silent for a time. Then suddenly she lifted her proud, flushed face to him.

"John, darling," she murmured.

Her dark eyes were misty, her red lips tremulous and very near, coaxing him, tempting him. Out of the turmoil of his thought he knew only the wonder of all that she offered him, and that this girl herself, the daughter of James Fenwick, was his to possess.

Her warmth, her softness, her heart that beat for love of him, called to him suddenly, and, crushing her in an iron clasp, he kissed her, returning the passion and longing in the lips she pressed to his.

"You will marry me soon, John?" she whispered.

"Soon," he answered dazedly. "Meantime, let me think."

She moved away from him, hiding the great content, the joy of conquest, that helped so much to ease the sense of bereavement in her heart.

Grant accompanied her downstairs and across the yard to the huge, closed-in car that waited outside the

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gates. He stood aside a little clumsily as the liveried footman handed in the rugs, and he got a glimpse of the luxurious interior, with its soft green upholstery and silver fittings.

Then, as the car curved into the road and went on its way, he turned and saw Nancy Leigh.

Nancy, in trim skirt and blouse, with her red-gold hair making a vivid splash of color against the drab background, was on her way from one department to another. She had stopped involuntarily, and Grant knew that she had witnessed his leave-taking with Lucy.

When he looked at her, the color left her face, and swiftly she went on her way.

John Grant went his, a bitter little smile twitching the corners of his lips.

Once more in the privacy of his office, he stood by the window, staring out on the new, giddy prospect that was his. He felt like Aladdin in the treasure cave. All this gigantic concern—its ships, its shops and forges, the control of thousands of men—was soon to be in his hands to be molded as he willed. His, with Lucy Fenwick.

Grant stood on. His eyes narrowed, his hands were clenched by his sides. People would soon hear the news—the friends who had scoffed at him, who had taken advantage of his good nature and generosity.

And, among them stood Nancy Leigh!

The inner voice was there still, calling to him. He strangled its cry, shut out ruthlessly the hidden doubts and fears that it sought to lay bare to him.

He had been a fool, a simpleton. Nancy had played with his love and dragged it in the dust. A harsh little laugh escaped him. She would soon know his changed circumstances; for the blow she had aimed at his pride he would be amply requited.

Nancy did not know what to think. Over her typewriter, she leaned in agonized fear and misgiving. And yet the stab of jealousy that had come to her when she saw Grant and Lucy together was quickly healed. It was incredible that there could be any real feeling between the pair—that there was even the remotest chance of Lucy's stooping to steal Grant from her.

Nancy was despondent, but not hopeless. She could not believe that he had gone out of her life for good; it could not be.

Her heart cried out for him. The pride that had kept her aloof was swept away before that tide of tender, eager longing. She felt utterly lonely. The words that would bring John back to her must be spoken.

Reaching home that night she looked for the opportunity. She hoped that he might be coming to her.

But it was not Grant's steady, forceful step that she heard, but one that faltered and hesitated.

Her brother Arthur came into the room. His hands shook over the cap he carried; his weak, pale eyes held a hunted light; and he hung his head as she faced him.

"What's the matter, Arthur?" she flashed at him. He looked frightened and ashamed, and anxiety

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leaped up in her heart. Nancy loved her scapegrace brother with a love that was, however, not unmingled with contempt when she measured him with other men she knew. "Tell me—you haven't been fired again?" she demanded.

He tried to face her.

"Not that, but I'm in a devil of a fix, Nancy," he started to say. It was not the first time he had appealed to her in his troubles. "It's the old story. I feel sick of myself, Nance. I've lost a lot of money lately, a big sum, and——"

"Whose money?" she asked, with a spasm of fear.

"Joe Hartley's," he answered. "Oh, it's not the firm's cash. I draw the line at that, Nance!"

"How much is it?" she whispered.

"Over two hundred and fifty dollars," he admitted huskily.

"Money you collected for Hartley, of course?"

He nodded, looking away furtively; he dared not tell her how Grant had already tried to pull him out of the same mess, and of the money he owed him.

"And Hartley knows?" Nancy locked her hands together in dread suspense.

"He's the only one that does so far," said Arthur. "And—and he won't wait."

"What does he say?"

"That he's going to the police."

Nancy's face became ghastly. She saw what would happen.

It would mean—prison!

She crumpled into a chair, her face sinking into her hands as she burst into tears.

Instinctively her thoughts flew to John. In her distress, it was John she wanted.

Arthur began to speak wildly.

"Don't you worry! I—I deserve prison, I know. I've had more than one lesson. But—the police won't get me." A queer, bitter laugh rattled in his throat. "No, I shan't go to prison, anyhow. Thought I'd let you know, in case——"

Nancy was at his side in a moment, her white face very stern, but her eyes pitiful in their appeal.

"Arthur! Don't talk that way! Why do you try to frighten me? You have been wicked—cruel—but I will help you—you know I will help you!"

He looked at her incredulously.

"You can do nothing—not this time!"

"I don't know; I'll try. Just let me think!"

He went away, with the terror of prison a little farther away. Nancy was left to herself, to wrestle with the new problem, and a new sense of shame filled her.

By herself, she would be powerless to cope with this danger to her brother—and to herself, for she felt that she would never be able to hold up her head again if they sent Arthur to prison.

It was getting late. She pulled down the blind on the fading summer sky, and turned on the lights. Then, knowing that Grant would not come that night, she sat down to write to him, all her little pride and sense of shame fleeing before her urgent need.

Her letter was a simple, piteous appeal:

John, I want you. I cannot go on like this—

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I cannot live another day thinking that you are angry with me, and that maybe you don't love me any longer.

In words that carried a bitter little cry she asked him if he believed in his heart that she had been false to her love. She told him how Lionel Benton had thrust himself upon her against her will, and that she cared for nobody but him.

The next day Nancy carried the letter about with her. Suddenly ashamed of the way it laid bare her heart, she waited, in the wild hope that he would yet come of his own accord, or that a suitable opportunity to speak to him might present itself.

But he seemed rather to elude her, and once, when the chance came, his forbidding look made her turn away. Driven to panic, with Arthur telling her that Hartley would not wait, that if anything could be done it must be done at once, she slipped into John's office one morning before he arrived and left the note where he would see it, feeling, through her shame and distress, that it would not go disregarded—that its cry would reach his heart.

CHAPTER V

TREACHERY

IN the conservatory, at her aunt's house, after dinner, Lucy Fenwick came face to face with Lionel Benton.

With the first depressing days following her father's death over, Lucy lived in the new brightness that the love of John Grant made possible. She mourned her father sincerely, but her impulsive visit to Grant and the joy that it had brought her, had taken away a good deal of the poignancy of her loss.

Yet Lucy could not help feeling a little shocked at the step her misery had driven her to take. She had been unnerved that morning and out of grief had come a great gladness. John Grant was to be hers.

In one brief hour the barriers had all been broken down. What had appeared to be an impassable gulf had been swiftly but surely bridged.

But he was not hers yet. Lucy quickly realized that. Knowing her man and, knowing the love that he must still have for Nancy Leigh, she felt that anything might happen to tip the scales against her.

She had not spoken again to Lionel about his infatuation for the other girl—her own rival. She wondered apprehensively, as she faced him, to what extent he realized that she was using him as a pawn.

He seemed to be morose, and divined at once the subject Lucy wished to broach.

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"You look out of sorts, Lionel," she began.

He laughed shortly.

"And you are making a shrewd guess why?" he returned, adding after a moment's pause: "There's been no further act in the little drama—or comedy, if you like—since that one in the summerhouse."

"Well, the coast is now clear for you to win Nancy. John Grant is engaged to me."

He stared at her incredulously.

"You're not in earnest? You don't mean that?" he gasped.

"I do. We're to be married soon. It's all settled."

"You must be mad!" His brain refused to take it in. He recalled the day when Lucy had pointed out John Grant, where he stood bare of arm and chest, before the leaping furnace fires. Such a man the husband of James Fenwick's wealthy and beautiful daughter? The picture was grotesque and laughable. "Of course," Benton went on ironically, "you made him assistant manager, or something, and he'll be wearing a collar now, and keeping his face clean!"

Lucy's eyes flashed angrily.

"Remember you are talking of my future husband!" she said. "You'll be afraid yet of John Grant. You will envy him!"

She turned and left him abruptly. Yet the innate honesty of the girl made her realize that the contemptuous amazement at her action she had seen in her cousin, was to be expected from every one else.

But she loved John with all her heart. That was

her justification, her right to him. The intensity of her love *must* win response.

Early next morning Lucy motored to the yard. Grant was not in his office. She was told that he had gone to one of the outlying workshops, but that he was expected at any minute.

"I will wait, thank you," she said.

When the door was closed she looked around the room. A little pile of letters lay trimly on the blotting pad. She glanced at them, and suddenly a guilty flush leaped to her cheeks.

She picked up a letter in a girl's hand, one she recognized in a flash as belonging to Nancy Leigh. Nancy's frequent visits to the house to take letters for Mr. Fenwick had made Lucy familiar with the neat handwriting.

What could the letter be about? She was devoured with curiosity and misgiving. It was impossible to believe that Grant and Nancy were carrying on a correspondence, and, from the absence of a postmark, it was clear that the girl herself must have put the letter there that morning, perhaps only a minute or two ago.

Just as the door was being thrust open, she slipped the letter between the pages of a big book, one of a number of volumes that lay on the table near.

Grant appeared on the threshold, his eyes lighting with surprise at seeing her. Lucy met his gaze with fluttering lids, and a swift crimson flush mounted from chin to brow.

"Hello! You must have been up early this morn-

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ing," he said lightly, as he came forward to take her hands.

Furtively she searched his face, and then, reassured, raised her cheek to him. Grant hesitated an instant, and then, stooping, kissed her.

"How are you, dear?" he asked in an even voice.

"Very lonely and sad, yet happy, John," she told him, still watching the inscrutable lines of his face and the calm, steady look in his slightly narrowed eyes.

"John, I want to get away from here for a time—somewhere where it is sunny and warm—where I can forget——"

He understood what she meant, and for an instant his lips tightened.

"So soon?"

"As soon as possible," she said. "Why should we wait, after all? I feel alone, forsaken. I want you, John!"

"You mean get married very soon?"

"Almost at once. Why not, dearest?" She raised her white, eager face to his for a moment, and then laid her head against his broad chest.

Grant looked away with unseeing eyes, his face hard and stern, and a faint smile, with something of cynicism and bitterness in it, twitching his lips.

"Are you quite sure you mean it, Lucy?" he asked suddenly. Now that it was almost upon him, the prospective change seemed too fantastic to be true.

"Why do you doubt, John?" she answered in a hurt, pleading tone.

"There is much to settle," he protested, and she

wondered with vague alarm if he were reluctant to go on—if, in his heart, he wavered.

She opened her vanity bag suddenly, and, taking out a card with an address inscribed on it, put it before him.

"My father's lawyer will do all that is necessary, dear," she said. "I want you to go to see him—to-day, if possible. Mr. Ratham is a very old friend of ours, and—and I have told him. He would like to have a chat with you. I hope you will like the arrangements he will make."

"You have settled it already?" he cried in surprise.

"Yes, dear. Why waste time?" she urged tremulously. "Let us get married, John, and go away for a time."

"Very well," said Grant, with a deep sigh. "I'll go and settle things with the lawyer to-day!"

Mr. Ratham, the lawyer, looked Grant over critically and with no little curiosity, as the big shipyard worker entered his private office.

Grant impressed him favorably at once.

"I hope you will forgive me if I appear too personal, Mr. Grant," he began. "The matter is, of course, a somewhat delicate one."

"Be as frank—as brutal—as you please," said the other.

"H'm! Miss Lucy has discussed the whole situation with me, and there are one or two points I wish to take the liberty of enforcing upon you. You are aware, probably, that Miss Lucy inherits practically all her father's property. I do not think, in view of

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the unusual circumstances, that I am breaking trust by telling you that the total value of the estate is just over two million dollars."

Grant nodded, his eyes widening a little, and the old lawyer went on.

"That, and the social position of your fiancée, entails, you will agree, a vast amount of responsibility on your part. As Miss Fenwick's husband, the control of Fenwick's Yards will be practically in your hands."

Mr. Ratham paused to let his words sink in, and Grant nodded a trifle curtly.

"You will have every encouragement, Mr. Grant. Miss Lucy has every confidence in you, and her generous spirit shows me the extent of the regard she has for you. I am to inform you that she proposes to settle on you, on the day of your marriage, securities to the value of half a million dollars."

Grant started.

"It's a lot of money!" he said. "It's kind of her."

"Miss Lucy naturally did not care to make any reservations," pursued the lawyer. "I think you will appreciate, however, that some return is expected of you. I am speaking now largely on my own responsibility, having the girl's good at heart—and yours, also, Mr. Grant."

A faint flush burned through the tan of John's face.

"I will do anything in my power gladly," he said.

"I think, then," continued Mr. Ratham, "that, in consideration of your fiancée's high social position, it will be up to you to fit yourself to take your place

by her side, Mr. Grant. You must give up, generally speaking, the life to which you have been accustomed."

Grant's face grew more tense, and his eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"I understand," he said.

"I am glad you take my words in the proper spirit. In some ways it will be hard for you, but—you will find the advantage later on." The lawyer bent forward to emphasize his words. "Take a firm stand," he advised. "Your old friends will very likely sneer at you and criticize you behind your back, but they will soon tire of that and let you alone. Lift yourself above them!"

Grant rose with a thrill of elation, a hard smile of triumph curling his lips. It was true. He would be sneered at, as he had been sneered at before.

But this time the bitterness would be theirs, not his.

"I will!" he said firmly, his eyes flashing.

The lawyer held out his hand.

"I have every confidence in you, Mr. Grant," he said. "I am sure you will go far!" He pondered for a moment, then went on. "Your credit now is practically unlimited. If you should need a sum of money for immediate use——"

"Thanks—I'll manage," said Grant in his curt, independent way.

He was a little sorry later, when he thought the whole position out more coolly. There was much that he needed. It was very probable, also, that

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Lucy would expect some token from him. It would be shabby not to give her a ring.

And at the moment he was practically penniless.

Then he recollected the two hundred dollars he had loaned Arthur Leigh.

Nancy's brother! That had been his excuse to himself. It was Nancy whom he had really been seeking to save. And she had played with him.

"By Heaven, I'll let them see——"

Dark with passion, Grant came to a decision. The money Arthur owed him would enable him to meet immediate wants. He *must* have it. It was his!

Carried away on the wave of his resolve, caring neither for Nancy Leigh nor for anybody else, he strode toward the Leighs' home.

It was late afternoon. The whistle had blown an hour before, signaling the end of the working day.

Nancy, meanwhile, walked home briskly, in an effort to calm the excitement she felt.

John, she knew, would never resist her appeal. He would see his great mistake—his folly—and come quickly to her, with the old, tender love shining in his eyes.

Throughout the day she had been mortally afraid of meeting him unexpectedly.

Somehow she did not want to see him in the yard.

But he had not come near her, and she had not even seen him. He was waiting, as she waited.

She hurried into the house, to find Arthur there. With a wild look in his eyes, he came to meet her, catching imploringly at her arm.

"Any news?" he asked, with twitching lips.

She felt a new access of fear. Then, recollecting that help was close at hand, that Grant must come soon, she was reassured. She tried to smile.

"Something will be done in time," she said. "We'll see Joe Hartley, and get him to wait—I promise you that much. John Grant——"

Arthur turned with a cry.

"Grant!" he echoed, recollecting how much Grant already knew of the affair, and of the promise he had given him. How bitter and furious he would be if he heard what had happened to his money.

"Look here—if it's Grant you're depending on——" he began in wild dismay.

Then suddenly he stopped, staring, as the door swung open. John Grant himself stood there, his giant form blocking out the light!

Nancy's eyes lighted up with the throb of gladness and gratitude that leaped to her heart.

He had come!

"John, you forgive me?" she cried, and impulsively, hungrily, her arms went out to him.

CHAPTER VI

GRANT CLAIMS HIS DUE

NEVER for an instant did Nancy doubt that Grant was there in response to her letter. Everything would be right now, she felt.

But he did not come flying over to gather her into his arms. He stood very still, hardly looking at her, his hands clenched and his eyes blazing.

"John," she murmured again, and her quivering lips tightened.

Grant laughed suddenly, a queer, mocking laugh. It had been a terrible ordeal to meet Nancy like this, to fight back his first wild impulse to respond to her greeting in the old way. But in an instant his brain was clear. He thought he saw the real motive for her warmth. He was an important personage now, and she, of course, was regretting her conduct and anxious only to make things up.

Grant's gaze traveled to the craven, shrinking figure of Nancy's brother, where he tried to conceal himself behind the girl.

With his strong jaws squarely set, Grant spoke.

"Oh, no, it isn't you I've come to see!" he said. "I thought you mightn't be in. But it doesn't matter. I'm after that brother of yours. I was fool enough to give him money lately—two hundred odd dollars—to help him out of a mess. Perhaps he'll

be man enough to return the loan since I find myself in need of it."

Nancy shrank back at his words. She turned to her brother. A hunted look came to her face, but, before Grant's stern gaze, she tried pitifully to smile, to hide the emotions that threatened to overwhelm her.

"Arthur, is—is this true?" she whispered.

"I'm sorry, Grant, but—I haven't a cent to give you," said Arthur with an effort. "I'm down and out."

"That isn't enough for me!" he cried. "I need my money—the money I gave you to save you from prison. And I mean to have it."

Arthur flung out his arms.

"I haven't a cent," he said.

Nancy, white to the lips, forced her eyes up to Grant's face.

"Tell me—how much did you give him?" she questioned coldly. "And why did you give it, and—and when?"

Grant explained.

"It was the other day, when Joe Hartley was pressing him for money he had lost—I handed over two hundred and fifteen dollars. It was all I had. Like a mad fool, I wanted to save him and—and you!"

Nancy strangled an agonized sob. That John Grant could speak like this to her and witness her shame and grief and helplessness, was more than she could bear. She waited a moment, her wide

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eyes fixed on his face as if she would convince herself of the reality of the scene.

"I need the money, and I must have at least some of it!" he declared again.

Arthur came forward with a sudden wild gesture. His face was drawn with fear.

"For God's sake, Grant, have some mercy!" he entreated. "If you won't do it for me, think of Nancy. I know I don't deserve pity, and I'll have to pay, I suppose, for my folly. Hartley didn't get that money—I—I squandered it. And any minute now the police will be here for me. I'll go to prison!"

Grant's lips curled with scorn.

"You coward! That's the kind of speech you made to me last time. But it's too late to think of mercy. I'll have nothing more to do with you or yours. You won't fool me again. Am I to lose my money? That's what I want to know!"

Nancy suddenly stepped between the men; her burning eyes were fixed on Grant.

"No, you will not lose your money, John Grant," she said steadily. "I'm glad to know about it. You gave Arthur the money, and I know you could not afford it. I shall see that you get it back at once, every cent of it!"

Grant was silent, and the anger left his face. For a long moment he listened to the call of his heart and fought with the mad impulse to cry out his remorse for the hard things he had said. But then he hardened himself against Nancy. She had fooled

him, he reflected. She was only trying to get around him, now that she knew of his changed circumstances.

"It means prison for me!" broke out Arthur, his last hope shattered.

"Never mind, you will get your money, John Grant," Nancy repeated. "I shall send it over to you at the yard to-morrow."

Grant was steeling himself.

"Thanks," he responded dryly. "There's no hurry, though."

He put on his hat and turned to the door. Even then he hesitated, his resolution almost broken down. He looked at Nancy, but it seemed to him that she was sure he would turn back, that his love for her would never let him go.

And so he went away, trying to crush the doubt and misgiving that made his step unsteady and brought a queer, hunted look to his eyes.

Nancy and her brother had not stirred. To the girl, it seemed incredible that John could leave her like this. Tears started to her eyes. It was not so much the sense of loss, or the knowledge that nothing now could save Arthur, as the terrible thought that John could speak to her as he had and treat her poor, heartbroken appeal with such cruelty. Yet it was true.

In the strained silence that had followed Grant's departure, a step sounded in the hallway. Nancy thought wildly for a moment that John had returned. But it was not he who now stood outside the door and called to her.

"Are you there, Miss Leigh? May I come in?"

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The girl flushed hotly and a fierce little flame leaped into her eyes. She went to the door and came face to face with the man who had brought this disaster upon her, Lionel Benton!

"Why have you come here?" asked Nancy breathlessly.

"Ever since that—that day out at Fenwicks' I've been meaning to see you," Benton said, and his earnestness and his look of contrition forced the girl to hear him. "Nancy, I want to ask your forgiveness. I was hasty, impulsive, and I did not think that you would take it the way you did. I was madly in love with you. I wanted you terribly, and that must be my only excuse. Say you will forgive me?"

She looked away wearily.

"Oh, it doesn't matter—not now," she answered bitterly.

He took her hand and gently but insistently went on:

"Nancy, I want to help you, to make up in some way for any harm I have done. I arrived a minute or two ago, and I confess that I overheard part of your conversation with Grant. Your brother is in trouble, I gather. Grant would not help. Please let me be of some assistance!"

Nancy stared at him.

"No, I would never think of it!" she said firmly.

"But surely you won't let what happened stand in the way, Nancy?" urged Benton. "Let me be a real friend. The money is nothing to me, and it may save you so much pain——"

"No!" she repeated. "Please go away. I am grateful, but——"

A cry from Arthur, at the window, interrupted her. He had espied two figures in the street; one was Joe Hartley and the other had the unmistakable cut of a plain-clothes detective. He might not have been sure otherwise, but the sight of Hartley with this stranger was enough.

"Look, here they are—the police!" he cried out in abject terror. "Nancy, for Heaven's sake, do something——"

She flung one terrified look into the passage.

"Please go away!" she said again to Benton, and, then, the strain threatening her with instant collapse, she turned from the room and fled upstairs.

Benton did not go away, however. He confronted the shrinking figure of Nancy's brother.

"For God's sake, help me!" chattered the boy.

"Tell me, how much do you owe, and to whom?" was Benton's hurried question as he produced his check book. Seated at the table, he filled in Joe Hartley's name and the amount that Arthur whispered huskily over his shoulder.

Half a minute later the door flew open and, with the detective at his heels, Hartley entered.

"That's your man, officer," he began, and stopped suddenly as Benton came suavely to stand before him.

"I'm afraid there has been some misunderstanding," said Benton. "If you are Mr. Hartley, Mr. Leigh and I were about to call on you. Here is a

check to cover the amount Mr. Leigh owes you. I think you will find it in order."

Hartley stood for a moment dumfounded. Then he seized the check and examined it eagerly. He was very curious, but Benton's name was familiar, and it was a great relief to receive back good money he had given up for lost.

"Quite," he said. "This looks O. K. I'm much obliged to you sir, and"—looking at Arthur Leigh—"I reckon you've had the narrowest escape of your life, my lad, and I hope it'll be a lesson to you!"

He said a word to the detective and the pair turned and left.

Leigh was overcome with relief. He wrung Benton's hand.

"You're a gentleman, you are!" he broke out. "I'll never forget, and if there's anything I can do to pay you back, I'll do it!"

"That's all right," said Benton airily.

He went toward the door, no longer concerned with the weakling before him, but hoping eagerly that Nancy might reappear. Yet when she did not come, he was not too greatly disappointed. On second thought, he decided that it was perhaps wise to give her time to get over this little affair. Later on, when she realized what his timely intervention had accomplished, she might be more willing to listen to him.

Benton went away. And, although she did not come to speak to him, Nancy watched him go.

On the landing, she had been constrained to wait and listen to what had gone on in the room below.

She had been on the point of retracing her steps at first to make an appeal to Hartley. But she knew he would not listen.

When it seemed that nothing could avert the disgrace of her brother's arrest, Benton had spoken. Nancy's first feeling was one of relief, of fervent thanksgiving. Arthur had been saved and so had she.

But swiftly came the oppressive thought that this served only to widen the gulf between John and her. It was as if Benton had taken her in his arms again, and, this time, proved his claim to her.

She went to the bank the next day and drew out every cent of her savings, the money that was so soon to have been spent on her trousseau and on a little home—hers and John's. There was enough to pay back what he had loaned to Arthur, and Nancy sent it to him without a word.

CHAPTER VII

THE WEDDING

THE days sped past. Grant did not give himself time to think, and the prospect of the power that would soon be his held him in thrall. Owner of Fenwick's with Lucy! Her home was to be his. In one leap, he would become a vital personage in the town.

Often a low laugh of triumph escaped him. What would his old friends think; the people who had called him "soft" and laughed at him behind his back?

In the hotel in which he had taken a suite pending his marriage, Grant was free from people who knew him too well. And only a few intimate friends of Lucy's were let into the secret. Lionel Benton was one.

"Well, you can't say later on that I didn't warn you!" was Benton's comment to his cousin. Secretly, he was overjoyed, and he did not doubt that Lucy herself was doing a wise thing to make sure of Grant before his eyes were opened to the wrong he had done Nancy Leigh.

With Grant out of the way, it would be so much easier to break down Nancy's opposition to his own proposals!

The wedding day dawned at last.

Only Benton and Lucy's most intimate girl friend and a new business acquaintance of John's, were present at the fashionable church in town. The ceremony was performed in the vestry. It was still early in the day, but a small crowd of interested passers-by gathered outside the church.

The handsomest of the Fenwick cars stood by the curb to bear off the happy pair on their honeymoon. It was the car and the little knot of people that caught the eye of Nancy Leigh as she came past in the morning sunshine, en route for her midday lunch.

Nancy looked like a sad little wraith, and she might have gone on without stopping, finding only pain in the happiness of the couple who were then within the church.

Suddenly, however, she saw a stir among the crowd and paused. The chauffeur of the big car opened the tonneau door and stood at attention, with a bundle of rugs thrown ready over his arm. Then from the church came the bridal pair, the girl a tall and queenly figure on the arm of—John Grant!

With a smothered little gasp, Nancy took a step nearer. She cried out within her heart that it could not be John. But there was no doubt. It was he, resplendent in silk hat and morning coat. And the girl beside him, who looked up at him with a smile, her daintily gloved hand over his arm, was Lucy Fenwick, the owner of the yard!

Neither Grant nor Lucy saw her, and, as the car moved out from the curb and went thrumming on its

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way, Nancy shrank against the railing to keep herself from falling.

John married to that girl—her own John!

She felt all her little world totter and crumple up about her. John had treated her cruelly when he doubted her, but, even when his eyes were flashing scorn, she had felt that deep down in his heart he still loved her and wanted her. Some day, she had felt, he would come back and ask her forgiveness. It seemed inevitable. Their love had not been a thing of a day, her own would live forever, and so, she had thought, must his.

Then she remembered the curious glances several people had given her at the yard. Some of them had known and she had not.

Summoning all her strength, Nancy went on her way. With a blinding mist before her, she set about her daily task. This was her portion, and it must be so until the end. Never, never could John be anything to her now, and life seemed utterly empty and aimless.

But the worst was not yet over.

The news soon spread, and everybody talked about it. Nancy read it in the papers: "Shipyard Romance," "Husband for Fenwick's Heiress," and so on. In the yard it created a hubbub, and Nancy Leigh's name was on every lip.

The girl saw the looks cast toward her. Everybody in the yard had known that she was Grant's sweetheart, and they regarded her now with pity.

For a day or two, she braved it out; it seemed

the only thing to do. Her daily bread depended on her work; moreover, Arthur was still idle and her help was all that stood between him and a precipitate descent downhill.

However, another thought came to shake her resolution. Presently, Grant and his bride would return. He would be daily going to and fro in the office, an important figure now. Fenwick's indeed would now become virtually his property—and she his servant!

Nancy's courage broke down. Shamed beyond endurance, she was driven to resign.

She had left the yard for good and, after a day's respite, was preparing for the struggle to find other work when, in the street near where she lived, a poorly dressed couple stopped her. They were John Grant's parents.

Nancy could hardly believe her eyes; they looked so bent and poor and shabby. In another minute, her heart was going out to them in amazed pity.

"What's come over you, Nancy Leigh?" said Mr. Grant. "You were our son's lass, and at first we blamed you for turning him against us."

"Against you?" echoed Nancy in bewilderment. "You don't mean——"

"Is it true, then, that he threw you over as he did his own folks?" asked John Grant's mother with a sigh. "Our John did that!"

Nancy flushed, but she was not thinking of herself.

"John and I quarreled," she answered simply. "But why do you speak that way of him? You

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cannot mean that his marriage will make any difference in his love for you?"

The man shook his head.

"John's not the same," he said. "He told us nothing of what was coming. I fear all this grandeur has turned his head. The old home wasn't good enough for him, and he left us—left us without a word. Perhaps when he comes back he'll remember his mother and dad. I expect that's it—the excitement and the big chance. He's rich now, of course. But——"

John's mother took Nancy's hand and the girl's heart was wrung.

"I hope you'll be happy some day, Nancy," said the woman pityingly. "Our John has taken a wife, but she won't make him as happy as you would have—not with all her riches and her high position. Dave and I are sorry, more'n we can say."

Nancy's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, you mustn't worry!" she cried. "John will never forget you. He isn't that kind of a man. When he comes home he'll send for you, and I am sure he'll make you both very comfortable and—and feel proud of you."

"Perhaps," said the man doubtfully. And, with his wife, he went on his way, shaking his bent head gravely.

Nancy watched them go in amazement and pity. Blind to all else about her, she did not notice the handsome gray racing car that drew up close beside her till a familiar voice called out:

"One minute, Nancy! I was on my way to see you."

Lionel Benton leaped down from the wheel and, standing beside her, his eyes went for a moment to the shabby couple he had seen leaving her.

"Friends of yours?" he asked curiously.

"John Grant's father and mother!" was Nancy's bitter response.

Benton whistled.

"Say, but they hardly look the part, eh?" he went on. He studied the girl with a new air of confidence. "I've been anxious about you, Nancy," he proceeded. "I heard you had left the yard office."

She nodded, her cheeks pale as she recalled her obligation to this man. But for his intervention, Arthur might then be in prison. Her brother's ruin would have been complete, and how could she have gone about holding up her head?

"And you must find another job, I suppose?" pursued Benton.

"Of course."

"Nancy, I want you to think——" he began. Her nearness and her helplessness moved him afresh.

"No, Mr. Benton, please do not go on like that!" she begged with a little shiver of fear and appeal.

He caught himself up in time.

"Nancy, you mustn't get me wrong," he went on quickly. "All I want is that you will try not to hate me. Let me be your friend."

"You know that you have made me your friend. You saved my brother," she told him in a worried

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voice. "I am trying to forget, but you mustn't come now——"

"Wait!" he cut in. "I heard you were out of work, Nancy, and I know that, indirectly at any rate, the fault is mine. I came to ask nothing of you, only to bear a message from my mother. Please don't consider me at all. My mother is a very busy person, you know—a great social worker, or reformer, or whatever you call a woman who meddles in other people's affairs. Lately she has been getting along alone, but the work is too much for her and I knew she was looking out for a secretary. I did this much—I mentioned you to her. She would like to have you call and see her."

Nancy flushed. It was the kind of work she had always wanted to do, and Mrs. Benton's name was not an unfamiliar one in the social and philanthropic life of the town. But——

"I dare not!" she said, more to herself than to Benton.

"Don't be foolish about it," he urged her eagerly. "You needn't be afraid of seeing much of me, Nancy. I'm seldom at home, and my mother's life and mine do not touch. Work like this would be just the thing for you, and my mother will be a friend to you."

In the end he broke down her opposition and she promised to go and see his mother. Benton hid the depths of his joy. When the girl would always be near to him, in his own home, he could afford to bide his time and make the most of his opportunity when it did come.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN HOLDS HIS OWN

BENTON had little love for his cousin's choice of a husband, and, even if he could bring himself to suffer John Grant's high and mighty air, there was one thing he would never forget or forgive—the man's hold on Nancy's affections. Even now that Grant could never be hers, he saw that the girl's greatest interest was for this other man; that he was shrined in a place in her heart from which nothing could tear him.

Benton went to the Fenwick place and discovered that great preparations were being made for the young couple's return.

Lucy planned a big reception to be held on their return, to which she had left instructions that everybody, who *was* anybody, was to be invited. It was to be a grand affair, and the housekeeper and other functionaries were having a busy time.

Benton grinned maliciously to himself at the idea of Grant in a dress suit. He wondered how he would manage to conduct himself before people who had hitherto scarcely known he or his family existed.

However, he did not have long to wait, for one of the handsomely embossed invitations had found its way to his home. A few days after Lucy and her new husband were back from their honeymoon,

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he and his mother were driving toward the brilliantly lit house with the rest of the social world of their little town.

"Lucy is pretty daring to present the husband she found in the yard to society so soon," Mrs. Benton observed, as they rolled along under the long arcade of trees which shadowed the driveway to the handsome house.

"Well, we'll see," smiled her son. "I must say Lucy has a head on her and she probably knows what she is doing."

On the stairway and up on the balcony, little groups of black-coated men and women in handsome gowns were gathered together laughing and chatting.

Lower down, there stood John Grant, the one-time workman from the yard, dressed in a beautifully cut dress suit and apparently very much at his ease, listening to the small talk of a slim little woman with a diamond tiara in her hair.

No one guessed what the effort had cost him to appear cold and restrained to the gay crowds of men and women from a world he had never known before.

There were a great many little forms he had picked up while off with Lucy on his honeymoon, and now, fully on his guard, he managed to conduct himself with great credit under the critical eyes who were secretly observing in amazement Lucy Fenwick's workman husband.

Now John Grant's usual manner of reticence and his cool, calculated way of meeting the world of men stood him in good stead in this new order of

things. At the end of the reception, he felt that at least he had not shown himself to be the clumsy fool that secretly he felt he was.

When the last car had hummed away into the night, he stood in the door and a thrill of pride rushed over him.

"You have succeeded, John Grant," said the voice of his inner self, "but the price!"

He clenched his big fists and stared out into the dusk. He was fighting back the old torturing doubt that almost made his heart stop with the thought of what he had done—that made him think, not only of his parents and the old home, but of Nancy Leigh.

Then a light step drew near, and with a sudden start John found Lucy beside him—Lucy, his wife!

She snuggled up to him, her soft, clinging arms stealing up to his neck, her red, full lips raised longingly, joyfully to his. Their eyes met, and, still stern and white of face, the man wondered what was in her thoughts.

He suffered her kiss. Then, with a short, hard laugh, that ended his brooding mood, he held her at arm's length.

"Well, how did I get on?" he challenged her.

"Splendidly, darling. I was proud of you," she answered earnestly, her dark, glowing eyes still fixed on his.

But Nancy Leigh was not the kind of girl to wear her heart on her sleeve. She told herself, as the days went past, that it was time for the sharp edge of her bitterness to wear off.

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John Grant, she knew, was nothing to her now, absolutely nothing. He belonged to Lucy Fenwick; was bound to the girl by the unbreakable bonds of matrimony. It was wrong to think of him in the old way, to feel that she missed him and hungered after him. Grant's love for her was in the past, dispelled like a dream.

Nancy was learning to like Lionel Benton's mother. That lady had gladly taken her on at a salary that made the girl lose nothing by her change of position.

Left a good deal to herself in the Bentons' home, Nancy soon found her courage coming back, and, with it, the cream and rose tint that belonged to her cheeks, and the clear, alert sparkle to her violet eyes.

Lionel had been as good as his word. He had exchanged polite greetings with her once or twice, but, beyond that, he did not attempt to revert to the attentions that had brought such lasting trouble upon her.

Having an afternoon to spare, she had dressed herself and was setting out when Lionel Benton appeared.

He started and flushed. It seemed to him that, now that she was getting over her sorrow, Nancy was becoming prettier every time he saw her.

"Hello!" he cried, adding impulsively, on a wild hope, "going anywhere in particular?"

"I'm going to see my brother," she said. "I don't want him to forget what you saved him from, Mr. Benton."

Benton put a check on himself. He was beginning to tire of the waiting game, but he realized that this was not the best of opportunities for altering his tactics.

He hesitated for a moment. Then:

"Know where to find him?" he ventured, somewhat furtively.

"I'm going to the office where he works——" began the girl.

"Reckon you won't find him there!" cut in Benton, with a short laugh. He went on hurriedly, as her eyes widened in surprise and suspicion. "It's all right, I suppose, but—I inquired for him casually the other day. For your sake, Nancy, I wanted to see if he was running straight after that lesson. I was informed that he had left—whether to go to a new job or for any other reason I was unable to discover."

Nancy paled with dismay.

"He did not send me word—I can hardly believe this——"

"Think I'm telling a lie?" he flashed, with a show of mild indignation.

"Oh, no, I don't mean that!" she cried in real distress, but, looking into his face, she felt instinctively that he was hiding something. "Anyhow, I shall go on and see. I must find out what it all means!"

Full of anxiety Nancy reached the foundry.

Coming into the counting house, she saw that her brother was not in his accustomed place. When she inquired for him she was referred to the head clerk,

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who came over to speak to her with some show of reluctance.

"Leigh left here over a week ago," he told her.

"But why? Where has he gone?" she urged.

"That I cannot say, Miss Leigh," was the answer. Then, "Perhaps I should inform you that your brother was dismissed. I am sorry, but—well, there you are!"

Nancy did not venture any further questions. She came away with her worst fears crystallized. It was the same old story. Lesson after lesson had he had, and, ever glib with his promises to do better when pulled out of a scrape, he always fell back into the old groove. He was past redemption!

Where had he gone? What had become of him?

Coming along the busy streets on her way back to the Bentons' house, she looked eagerly into the faces that streamed past, praying that she might see Arthur before it was too late.

Then, suddenly, she stopped, drawing shrinkingly in by a shop window.

The shop was that of a big florist, and coming out at the door was—John Grant!

In his arms he carried a costly bouquet of flowers, intended, no doubt, for his wife. Nancy's pained, wondering eyes took in the great change in him. In silk hat and speckless morning coat, he looked the picture of a very fine gentleman.

A huge, shining limousine thrummed at the curb, with one man at the wheel and a footman standing by, ready to hand in the rugs and close the door upon John.

Grant was halfway across the footwalk, with people standing aside to stare, when a mite of a girl, shabbily clothed, and with a famished, worn-out look on her somewhat dirty face, appeared. For a moment the mite hesitated, an ancient, battered doll clutched in one arm.

Then, with a cry of bewilderment and joy, she reached up to John Grant, tugging at his coat tails to hold him back.

"Uncle John!" she called. "Oh, I've missed you such an awful lot!"

A strange thing happened then.

John had looked thoughtful, with eyes for nobody. Hearing the well-remembered little voice, and seeing one of his dead brother's kiddies before him, his heart responded to the joyous recognition.

Reaching down, he picked the mite up into his strong arms, the pretty flowers he was taking to Lucy crushed and forgotten as he did so. For a long moment he held the little girl in a tight, glad clasp. Then her voice recalled him.

"Mummy missed you dreadful, Uncle John," she began, in her prattling way. "Where have you been all this long time?"

Then John saw his mistake. A flush leaped to his cheek. For an instant he looked round him, and among the circle of curious faces he saw Nancy Leigh's!

His eye held Nancy's for the fraction of a second. He saw her alarm and dismay, and something else besides—a strange, tender light in her eyes, that reminded him, with a pang, of the dead-and-gone past.

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That look of hers made him hesitate and still hug his little niece tightly to him. It was as if Nancy saw him as he used to be—the man she loved, with his old real self shining through the veneer of the present. It was as if all the bitterness that had come between them was swept aside, and he saw her as she used to be, her great eyes ashine with tenderness and loyalty and stanch pride in him.

It was a hallowed moment, that, but in the next John Grant awoke to stern reality. He did not care so much for the staring passers-by. He felt only that he had shown himself weak before Nancy Leigh.

Quickly he put the child down. He pressed some small change into the tiny fist, and with a gentle pat on the curly head as she looked up into his face wonderingly, he hurried to the waiting car, and was borne away.

The mite stared after him, bewildered tears springing to her eyes.

It was Nancy's chance then. With a tender, pitying cry she ran to the child and clasped her to her aching heart.

"Don't fret, deary," she heard herself say. "Uncle John is very busy these days, but he will not forget you and your mummy." Then, more cheerfully, as she lifted the kiddie up into her arms, "Tell me, what are you doing so far from home? You look so tired, you poor dear. I'm sure you're lost. Come, I'll take you back to mummy!"

Coming to the yard next day, John Grant strode into his new place, the office that had been James Fenwick's.

The manager of his old department, who had given him his first job at Fenwick's, was waiting in the outer office, with the other heads of departments, to attend the daily conference he had instituted. Grant gave him a curt greeting, and left him and the others to wait till he was ready.

With the stenographer who had filled Nancy's place in attendance he proceeded to go over his correspondence.

Suddenly his fingers lighted on a cheap-looking communication addressed in a familiar hand. His hands trembled on it, and for an instant his surroundings were forgotten. Hurriedly he tore the thing open.

It was from his mother.

DEAR JOHN: Your dad and me received the lawyer's letter about the allowance you intend to make us. We are just broken-hearted to think you should seek to help us in this roundabout way, and your dad and myself want to say that we'd rather do without the money. It's not money we want, my son. It's not our fault that we're poor. We did our best by you, and we just can't bear to think that the son we brought into the world and loved with all our hearts can want to turn his back on us. John, it's too wicked and cruel. Your loving Mother and Dad.

John stared at the words a moment, with tightening lips. Then he rose from his chair and paced fiercely to and fro across the soft carpet.

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Wheeling round suddenly, he found the curious eyes of the girl upon him. His jaw locked, and his hands clenched.

With a quick sigh he tore his mother's letter to pieces and cast the fragments from him. Then the day's work claimed him.

CHAPTER IX

ARTHUR PAYS A CALL

NANCY'S anxiety about her brother increased as the days went past with still no word of him. She made inquiries of various friends, and heard that he was still in town; but what he was doing was a mystery. She wrote to him, hoping that he might receive her letter and answer it, but it came back with the laconic message: "Removed. Left no address."

One afternoon a message was brought to Nancy by one of the maids, who looked as if her dignity had been somewhat put out.

"If you please, Miss Leigh, there's a person called to see you—your brother, I believe!" she said.

Nancy leaped from the task on which she was engaged, and hurried into the hall. She pulled up suddenly, filled with shame and consternation.

"Hello, old girl!"

Arthur came swaying up to her, holding out his hand. He was very much the worse for drink, his eyes red and rolling in a blotched face, and his hat tilted on one side. With a rush of anxiety, too, Nancy saw that he was wearing new, flashy clothes.

She caught at his hand to steady him.

"Arthur!" she appealed. "What does this mean? Oh, why did you come to see me like this?"

"Don't seem very pleased to—hic—see your

brother!" he tried to say. "Long time since I saw you. Thought I'd look you up—see how you're getting on. Things are—hic—better a bit now, eh? How are you off for cash?"

There was revolt in Nancy's heart, and she was ready to cry with chagrin. She knew that Mrs. Benton wasn't far away—that she would be coming past on her way out at any minute.

"I am perfectly all right," she replied wildly. "But I can't speak to you here—and, really, I don't want to! You look disgusting." A righteous anger swelled within her. "I feel as if I never want to see you again! What have you been doing? Where did you get the liquor to make you like this, and the money to pay for it? Are you working somewhere?"

"Working?" he echoed, with a silly sneer. "I'm above that sort of thing. Had a bit of luck, you know. Hic—leading a gentleman's life, old girl!"

Fear urged her to find out what he meant.

"But how?" she insisted, making him face her.

"How what?" he retorted, beginning to look shiftily around at his sister's handsome surroundings. An open door beyond gave him a glimpse of a drawing-room filled with costly ornaments and curios. "There's nothing to go making a fuss about," he went on. "Fine place, eh? Doing you handsome, I 'spect! If you should need a fiver, old girl——"

He brought out a pocketbook, in spite of Nancy's efforts, and was taking out a bundle of bills to show her when a step came on the stairs.

Nancy's heart stood still.

"Please, please go!" she begged.

But in another moment Mrs. Benton was upon them. Arthur stared at her and grinned. Then, having enough intelligence left to understand the stricken look on his sister's face, he mumbled something and turned toward the door.

"See you another time!" he called as he went.

Mrs. Benton stopped before Nancy, an indignant flush in her cheeks. And the girl could do nothing but stand with bowed head, waiting for the hard words that somehow always fell on her, leaving the real culprit to go on his blissful, uncaring way.

"Who is that, Miss Leigh?" asked Lionel Benton's mother imperiously.

"My brother," Nancy answered. Then, looking up tearfully, "Oh, I'm so sorry he should have come here in that condition."

Mrs. Benton was speechless for an instant.

"This is scandalous!" she snapped. "You must be more careful. I can't have such disgraceful scenes in my house."

And she hurried out to the motor brougham that awaited her.

Nancy was crimson with shame. Her doubts and fears for the ne'er-do-well rushing back upon her, she went out into the vestibule to see if he had really gone.

Suddenly she heard his voice just beyond the hedge that fronted the house, and, after taking an impulsive step or two along the path to the gate, she stopped in consternation.

Arthur seemed to have sobered up rather quickly.

"For God's sake, forgive me!" she heard him cry.

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Then came another voice—the voice she still distrusted and feared—that of Lionel Benton.

“Not another penny will you get out of me!” he said, with disgust and anger. “You’re about the most sorry specimen I ever saw. I’ve been a fool to give you so much money. Well”—a sudden elation creeping into his tone, which Nancy was quick to catch, and which turned her heart cold—“go on, down to the dogs, as fast as you like. I won’t put out a hand to help you again—that’s straight. Get out of my sight!”

Nancy did not wait to hear more. She heard Benton turn away, heard his step turn toward the gate, with Arthur still keeping by his side and making blubbering appeal. Afraid of meeting Benton just then, she flew indoors and upstairs to her own room.

Nancy was glad when the Bentons moved into their country home for the hunting season, taking her with the party.

At first she had felt that she could not bear to meet Lionel, after what she had overheard. She had even thought of leaving Mrs. Benton, urged on also by the unsavory scene with Arthur, and the annoyance her employer had suffered. There were too many things to consider, however, and she could not afford to throw up her job.

Nancy found it hard to make up her mind as to Lionel’s attitude.

He had deceived and lied to her when she had sought, in her anxiety, to know of her brother’s

whereabouts. And all the time he had been giving Arthur money! For what purpose? Had he done all this simply with the desire to help the wastrel to make a new start? Was it a kindly feeling that had prompted him to hide from her all he knew?

The change of air helped her. Mrs. Benton was very kind, and had evidently got over the shock to her feelings. She meant to have a real holiday, she told the girl; and Nancy, she added, was to make the most of the change also, and get some color into her cheeks.

The Lodge was in a pretty, bracing part of the country.

At times Nancy felt happy. Benton had gone to New York, she heard, and she hoped fervently that he would remain away for some time. That he would miss the hunting altogether was not, of course, to be expected.

The first shock came during the week-end following their arrival.

A few people had arrived from the city. Nancy did not see who they were till after lunch on the following day.

With the arrival of the mail, Nancy was summoned into the drawing-room to receive some instructions from Mrs. Benton, and the first person she saw as she entered the room was John Grant's wife!

Lucy looked up casually as the girl came into the room. A deep flush mantled her face and neck as she saw her late rival. Nancy had stopped involuntarily, utterly taken aback. As the girl was well known to her, Lucy forced an icy little smile.

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She turned her head at once, to resume her conversation, and with an effort Nancy sought her employer, her heart pounding with dismay at the frozen look the other had given her.

But more was to come.

Nancy's thoughts flew to John. Was he here, also? Somehow, she did not doubt it. Lucy never seemed to be far away from him these days.

Nancy was hardly prepared, however, to see her old lover—to run right against him, in fact—just as she came out of the door.

"I beg your pardon," she began, and, looking into Grant's face, was ready to fly in panic.

He was on his way into the drawing-room, in company with another male guest. He was smoking, and, as Nancy collided with him, the pipe dropped from his mouth and clattered to the floor.

"Nancy!"

The name was on his lips, but he checked himself in an instant, and stooped to recover his pipe.

She hurried away, as if a little demon were at her heels. Reaching the study, she sank panting into a chair; afraid of the look she had seen on Grant's face at the moment of recognition, afraid of the sickening throb of longing that it had started in her breast.

It was all mad and impossible, but Nancy seemed to have found the truth—that all was not right with John Grant, and that, deep down in his heart, their love was not forgotten.

She tried to shut out the thought.

He was Lucy Fenwick's husband now. He could never, never be anything to her.

She had to keep telling herself the bitter truth. Ashamed and dismayed, she turned to the work she had to do, determined only that she would keep out of the couple's way as far as she humanly could. It would be wise to meet them if the occasion arose—even to speak to them, if necessary, without thinking anything about it.

After all, why should she feel disturbed and miserable? Grant and his wife were like the Bentons and all the other people who belonged to this set. She was of another world, only an employee, and her pride urged that Grant should be given his proper place and rigorously kept there.

Grant was also trying, as far as possible, to avoid another unfortunate meeting. Neither Lucy nor he alluded to Nancy's presence. Like his wife, he tried to shut the girl up in the past.

But, deep in his inner self, he was disturbed.

For the first time in their short wedded life he was a little harsh with Lucy. Never very tender with her, never seeking her company at any time with that glad eagerness that springs from real affection, he seemed now to keep out of her way. His tone when he spoke to her was matter-of-fact and irritable.

Lucy's intuition told her the reason why. She knew that she had nothing to fear—that, even if Nancy Leigh were ready to stretch out a forgiving hand to him, John would be steadfast to his vows.

Regretfully she realized that the door to her husband's love was still locked against her.

She was hopeful, however, and all her efforts and strategy were concentrated on beating down the barriers that stood in her way.

With secret fury, she looked upon Nancy's presence as a fresh blow at those efforts. Nancy was still the greatest barrier of all.

The unexpected arrival of Lionel Benton gave her a cue.

At the first opportunity she spoke to her cousin.

"This is a brilliant move on your part, getting Nancy Leigh into your home!" she told him. "I'm sorry for you, Lionel. You are eating your heart out, and pretty Nancy looks on, calm and unmoved!"

"How do you know?" he flashed.

She spread her arms with an air of superior wisdom.

"Don't be so sure!" Benton went on, with restrained anger. "I'm not hustling against time as you did, Mrs. John Grant. I'll get my way, and all in good time!"

Lucy laughed lightly as he left her, and saw that her little stab had gingered him up. Very soon something might happen.

Next day Nancy was sitting in the little morning room, adding up the previous day's accounts and going over the morning's correspondence, when Benton came in. He closed the door behind him and came toward her with a strained expression on his face. Nancy rose instinctively to her feet.

"I thought you had gone shooting, Mr. Benton," she said.

"Oh, I was too tired—up late last night," he said.

Then he drew nearer to the girl, his eyes gazing hungrily upon her. "I made up a story about a sprained ankle. I wanted to be near you, Nancy—to see you!"

"Please, please, Mr. Benton!" she cried, her face paling, and her heart racing with terror.

Suddenly he caught her and held her, so tightly and fiercely that a frightened cry was wrung from her. Benton did not seem to mind.

"Nancy, I can't go on like this any longer!" he burst out, in a voice husky with passion and appeal. "Why are you so afraid of me? I love you—I'm mad about you! Don't you see how much I need you? Try to be kinder. Don't put me off any longer, for I mean to have you."

"You coward!" she cried. "Leave me alone." Then, as he allowed her to elude him for a moment, she stood, shaking and wild-eyed, her back against the wall. "You coward, to take advantage of me in this way!" she blazed. "Oh, don't you think I've suffered enough at your hands? If it hadn't been for you, I should be happy now. You made John Grant leave me and believe me faithless and bad! Have you no decency, no pity?"

Once more, urged by his mad, baffled passion, he reached out a hand to her.

Out on the terrace that ran along the house, John Grant could not help overhearing. His ignorance when it came to sport had suggested a plausible excuse and taken him into the sunshine with a book. It was really for Lucy's sake that he had accepted Mrs. Benton's invitation, and he was looking for-

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ward with eagerness and relief to the time of departure.

Hearing Nancy's voice and Benton's first outburst, he had started impulsively to his feet. Like one in a trance he had listened to what followed. And now, his face drawn and ashen because of the words he had heard Nancy say, he could contain himself no longer.

The girl was fighting against Benton's cruel embrace, a helpless, desperate cry rising to her lips, when suddenly the French window was thrown back on its hinges. John Grant stood on the threshold, his brow as dark as night.

CHAPTER X

HALF THE TRUTH

WHAT does this mean?" flashed Grant. His tone cut like the lash of a whip. The pained bewilderment died out of his eyes, and in its place leaped a fierce, burning wrath. The conviction rushed in upon him that Nancy Leigh had nothing but fear for this man, and that he had done her an incalculable wrong.

Benton was not easily scared, but he cowered before the erstwhile workman in sudden fear and dismay.

Grant hesitated only an instant. Then, his fists clenched up, he strode toward the other man as if he would strike him down.

It was then that Nancy stirred herself. Grant's sudden entrance, and the fear that he had overheard and that he now probably understood, made her shrink away in consternation. Benton was forgotten. With heart standing still, she had eyes only for the man to whom it had been her first wild impulse to fly for protection, but from whom she now shrank in shame and resentment.

She put herself between the two men.

"You are too late, Mr. Grant!" she cried, a hot flush spreading in her cheeks. Her eyes defied him to interfere in what no longer concerned him.

"Too late? What do you mean?" Grant stared

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down at her, his eyes full of the conflict of emotion going on in his heart. "Didn't you call? Why, you look scared to death. And this man—this scoundrel——"

"Don't go rushing to conclusions, if you please!" Benton said sullenly.

"Please go away!" Nancy turned to entreat him. After some hesitation, Benton obeyed, stopping at the door for a moment to throw back an angry scowl.

Nancy faced her old sweetheart alone.

"Mr. Benton is right," she forced herself to say. "I'm afraid you are rushing to wrong conclusions, John Grant. I—I did not think you were about. It was nothing. We only quarreled."

She meant him to go at once, but Grant stood his ground. For a moment he wondered if he was wrong. He prayed fervently that he was, for the agony of his first thought was more than he could bear. Nancy had spoken with trembling lips, her face ghostly white again. A torturing doubt assailed him. His mind swayed him one way, his heart another.

Grant regarded her with set, hard face.

"I wish I knew the whole truth!" he said harshly, although he knew he was fighting all the time to shut it out. There was catastrophe in the air. The feeling that he had been duped—that Nancy had been wronged and misjudged—threatened to unnerve him.

But what could he do now? She supplied the answer.

"I would remind you that my concerns are no longer yours," she said coldly. She felt she could endure this mockery no longer, that the mask must fall from her face.

Grant seemed to awake to the present.

"Very well, I am sorry if I intruded!" he said in a hard voice, and went back to the veranda.

Alone, Nancy tried vainly to control her emotion. She felt very weak, and, crumpling up in a settee, buried her throbbing head in the soft cushions.

For a time it was only of John Grant she could think. But there were other things to think about.

Benton's madness had robbed her of the little happiness that had been left her.

One thing seemed inevitable—she must leave the house and Mrs. Benton's service without delay.

Even as she considered the step, one of the maids appeared with a letter for her.

Nancy saw at a glance from whom it came. Wonderingly, she tore it open.

MY DEAR NANCY: I feel that I am utterly beyond your further forgiveness, but I want to say how sorry I am for what has just occurred. I beg you not to leave my mother because of me. I am going away to-night. I promise not to see you for a long time to come, and I only hope you will try to think of me more kindly than you do now. Yours devotedly,

LIONEL BENTON.

Nancy was hardly relieved. The letter, indeed, disturbed her more and more. She decided, however, that it would be wiser not to rush headlong from the

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Lodge, partly out of respect for Mrs. Benton, but chiefly for fear of what John Grant might think.

Meanwhile, John tried to concentrate on the book before him, but his strong will failed him.

In spite of his efforts, he found his mind searching into the past and piecing little incidents together. It was a mad desire, at this late hour, but he wanted the truth, the bare, brutal truth.

Did Nancy really fear Benton? Had he, in his blindness, driven the one girl in all the world into this bully's hands—willfully stood by and scorned her, when all the time her poor, amazed heart was crying out to him to save her?

Wildly Grant thrust the conviction from him. He felt that to give credence to his new suspicions would be to turn his hair white with a mad, impossible regret.

He must not forget Lucy, his wife. And, with Lucy in his mind, his hands clenched and his eyes glittered with an ominous hardness. He recalled many things. There was, for instance, the night when he had seen Nancy in Benton's arms, just as he had seen her that day.

Benton had forced himself upon her in the morning room, finding her alone. Was it not probable, also, that he had forced his embrace upon her that other time? He, John, had been just in time to see her beat herself free. He had thought at the time that it was the sight of him that had made her look so frightened.

In a fever of doubt and misgiving, Grant let his

thoughts race on. He recalled the circumstances in detail, especially in relation to Lucy. She had seemed upset, he recollected, and he had thought it strange that she should ask him, a humble workman as he then was, to come out on to the balcony to admire the gardens.

Yes, she had known that Nancy was there with Benton. It must have been a dastardly plot!

Grant rushed to the conclusion. He fought it off next moment, willing himself to disbelieve it, but the wound remained.

His face looked forbidding as he returned to the house.

A car had drawn up on the road outside, and Lucy herself stepped from it.

She paused for an instant, her eyes nervously seeking the house as if she shrank from going into it. Benton had sent her a brief note of warning:

Afraid the cat's out of the bag. Be on your guard with G. I was having a passage with N. in the morning room when he interfered. He wanted to know the truth. I don't suppose she told him everything—she has too much sense, after all. But watch. I'm sick of the whole affair, and have faked a reason for an urgent trip to town. Will probably stay away some time.

LIONEL.

What had John actually discovered? Lucy hoped fervently that it was only suspicion. She reflected that, at the worst, she could defy him—Nancy could never be anything to him now. But she was fighting

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to be John's wife in more than name. She wanted his love.

John was upon her suddenly as she came in at the gate.

"John, I feel so ashamed," she told him. "I felt very unwell, and had to come away. Oh, I am so miserable and tired!"

With a broken little sob, that was not so unreal, she clung to him for a moment. He did not repulse her, nor did he speak for a time, and she saw clearly that, surprising him with this story, she had stilled the words that rose to his lips. Furtively she looked up into his face. It had a granite hardness, and there was almost a sneer on his lips.

"What is the matter?" he said at length. She seemed very weak, and he came with her into the hall and searched her face with a new, detached anxiety. "Shall I call a doctor?"

"No, no," she urged. "I must go and rest. I—I hate making a fuss, dear. And, John"—coming up to him trembling, with tears in her eyes—"I am tired of this place. I want our own home, dear. Please take me back home!"

"Very well. We'll go in the morning," he said, with a sudden hard sigh. He did not add that that had been his intention. He had meant to go alone, but looking on her evident distress he saw the futility of the mad passion that was in his heart.

This girl was his wife, and he must stand by her. It was his duty. Nothing on earth could alter that.

CHAPTER XI

A MOTHER'S LOVE

DURING the hard times in store for them no word had passed between Dave Grant and his wife about the son who had so brutally deserted them. John was as one dead. He had gone right out of their lives, and as day after day passed it seemed tolerably certain that the old home would know him no more.

Dave had found work as gateman at a factory near at hand, but the trouble that had kept him an invalid lately soon laid him up.

John's mother had some of the stubborn fighting spirit of her son, and rather than see Dave in the poorhouse she was ready to work her fingers to the bone.

One day an unlooked-for chance tempted her.

Although nothing was said about John he was never very far from their thoughts. Secretly Dave and his wife worried. It seemed an incomprehensible thing that the son who had lived with them all his days, who was the apple of their eyes, could want to shut them out of his life forever. It was unlike their John. There was something wrong, they argued in their hearts, and they kept praying hopefully that things would turn right side up again and John come to stand by them.

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Secretly the woman went once or twice to the neighborhood of his palatial home, in the hope that she might get a peep at her boy. She had heard that he rode in a fine, big car, and wore the clothes of a real gentleman—and looked like one, too. She did not care about the grandeur, though. Just to see his face, to find that he had not changed!

Then, one day, John's mother found herself before the gates of Fenwick's Yard. It was almost an hour before closing time when the army of workmen would come pouring out, and she wondered if John would appear in his motor car before that time.

Keeping out of the way for a time, at last she timidly approached the gateman, asking the sour old man if Mr. Grant had left the yard.

"No, he ain't here to-day. What do you want wi' him, anyhow?"

Mrs. Grant was turning disappointedly away when a legend, stuck up on the notice-board, attracted her attention.

"Cleaning woman wanted. Apply head clerk," it said.

She pondered for a time, shaking with the excitement of the chance. It would mean a few dollars a week—all that she really needed for the little things for Dave—and, what was more, it would bring her very near to John, without his knowing. Perhaps she would have his room in the office to clean up and get ready for him in the mornings, before he arrived.

She spoke again to the gateman.

"Go on up to the office," he advised her.

Two mornings later, John Grant arrived at the

yard long before his wonted hour. The incident at the Bentons' place in the country still rankled, and, in an effort to crowd out the doubts that tortured him, he had turned to the work that was his one unfailing interest in life these days. The lust of still greater power was upon him—the desire to wring out of existence in this way that which was beyond him in another.

This morning he was in an aggressive mood. He proceeded round the various "shops," and, when the foreman or head of the department appeared in haste and trembling, he had biting criticisms to offer. Long ago he had remarked that it was easy to pick holes. He picked them now, with a vengeance.

And so the inspection went on, until, when it was still early, Grant arrived before the block of offices. His manager had joined him, and other "heads" stood respectfully near while he rapped out a few final words.

Then, just as he turned toward the entrance, he stopped short.

"John!" gasped a well-remembered voice.

A pail clattered loudly onto the floor of the passage, and, brush in hand, her sleeves rolled up on her thin arms, and an expression of blank dismay on her face, John Grant's mother stared up at her gentleman son.

"John!" she whispered again, in scared appeal.

He looked harsh and forbidding as he stood before her, thunderstruck at her presence in such a place. Then, swiftly, as his glance took in her appearance, and the pail and brush she carried, he

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understood, and a look of savage fury came to his face.

"What the devil are you doing here like this?" he flashed. Then, as she only shrank from him. "Who gave you the job?"

"John, I didn't mean you to see me," she broke out, with a frightened sob. "The head clerk in the office was kind and I——"

This was evidently all that John Grant wanted to know. He stood against the wall of the passage and pointed toward the gates.

"Go!" he cried. "You've no business here. You only came to shame me. Go!"

And, his brows black with anger as he saw the eyes that followed the incident, he stood there defiantly till his mother had fled from before him like a crushed, hunted thing.

Still in a passion of fury, John Grant went on to his private room. He rang for his head clerk, and when the unsuspecting man appeared, spoke to him bitingly.

"You engaged that woman?" he fired, and, when the clerk admitted that he had, "Thought it was a smart piece of work engaging my own mother?"

Amazed, the man protested that he had had no idea of the woman's identity.

"Don't tell me lies!" burst furiously from Grant. He rose to his feet and pointed to the door. "I'll teach you to mind your own business in future," he went on. "Consider yourself dismissed. Go to the cashier, get your money, and clear out!"

And so, without another word passing, the door closed on the man who had spent practically his life in the service of Fenwick's, and had kept an unblemished record through it all.

Grant still scowled savagely. He derived no satisfaction from this action. He felt suddenly that the man had spoken the truth, and that he was striking below the belt.

But he did not care. A thin smile curled his lip. This was power, he urged to himself, the ability to make or break a man at his will. And his mother——

He went a few paces across the room, his hands locked behind his back, little blue veins suddenly knotting his temples. He drove himself to the conclusion that he had been justified in what he had done. It must have been out of a desire to shame him that his mother had lowered herself to the level of a common scrubwoman, and found this job in his own offices. He had offered her a substantial weekly allowance, and she had refused it. She deserved no sympathy.

Grant hurled himself into his chair again, and sought to shut out the events of the morning in the work before him.

He was destined to be reminded of them very soon, however.

That day murmurings arose within the yard, and by the following morning a strike was declared, out of sympathy with the head clerk, who had been so summarily dismissed. The grudges of the other men whom Grant had sent about their business were like

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fuel to the fire. Practically every man in the yard went out.

"I'll fight the brutes!" cried John when he heard.

He knew what was being said among them and that he would be held up to ridicule and scorn. But he did not mind. His blood was up, and he was ready to fling himself heart and soul into the conflict that would show who had the master hand.

The workers knew that the Fenwick millions had been made out of their toil. The old owner, however, had had immense popularity. He had been strong, gripping the reins of the big business with an iron hand, but he had a kindly heart, and had done a good deal for the people of the town. That all his wealth should suddenly fall into the hands of his daughter, the cold beauty who had done nothing all her life but have a good time, had brought about some grumbling.

But later, when one of their own kind had risen from poverty and obscurity to step into James Fenwick's shoes, bitterness and jealousy had been born in every heart.

Knowing John Grant of old, the men and women who earned their bread in the yard that was now virtually owned by their old mate, hoped to see a desire on his part to better the conditions of the common herd to which he had belonged. For he understood as no born gentleman could possibly understand.

Swiftly disillusionment had come. John Grant's hand had but tightened the reins the old master had

given up. And his heart was as hard and ruthless as his grip.

At length the scorn in their hearts had burst forth unrestrained. Old grievances were revived, and new ones were on every tongue. Meetings were held outside the yard, and later in the day a move was made toward John Grant's home.

The hotheads were for going straight up to the house and throwing down the high iron gates, locked against them, if need be. The mob increased in size, and anything might have happened, when Grant himself arrived on the scene, on his way home.

His car was held up by the crowd. They swarmed about it, and bitter recriminations were hurled at the master who had risen from their ranks.

John faced the mob fearlessly. If they meant to use brute force in making their appeal, he would turn it down with the same weapon!

"You'll be glad to reason with me before you finish!" he flung at the men nearest him. "Not a stroke will be done at the yard till I see the last man quietly in at the gates. I'll show you who's master! Starve, if you will. I can wait."

One man, raised above the heads of the others, began to speak in smashing, unmeasured terms. He demanded the immediate reinstatement of the head clerk, and, pointing the finger of scorn at Grant, went on:

"It's time something was done to clip his claws—this man who was one of us, and who would now treat us as dirt! And it's not only you and me, his old mates. What man, with any feeling left in him,

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would see his own mother go down into the gutter? That's where John Grant is sending his! And when she tried to turn an honest penny by scrubbing in his own yard, with him in his silk hat and motor cars and what not, what does he do but order her off like a piece of dirt—sacks his own mother!"

Grant went white at the reproach and at the menacing of the crowd. But worse was to come.

"And more," pursued the spokesman, "there's Nancy Leigh. We all know Nancy for one of the best of girls, and we know what happened to her. This cur here threw her over—cast her aside like an old boot—for gold!"

There was a short, ominous lull as the crowd listened and nodded in acquiescence. John tried to keep a grip of himself, but this last taunt was too much for him. He rose up in the car, shaking and furious, to give back the lie.

But suddenly and dramatically it came from other lips.

Nancy Leigh herself stood on the edge of the crowd. She had chanced to be passing, and had heard of the demonstration before Grant's home. Urged by an impulse that was only half curiosity, and which sprang largely from a vague fear for John's safety, she had come up unobtrusively to hear what was going forward.

Sight of Grant and his peril kept her by the crowd when it was in her heart to flee. Watching him anxiously, she felt that she both hated and admired him. He was the old John at that moment, in so far as he faced the mob with his wonted un-

flinching courage. She loved the fight in his eyes, in the tense, squared lines of his strong face.

Yet the change that had come to him was never more marked than now. About this hard, strong, defiant personality there was none of the tenderness and quiet, winning restraint that had belonged to the man she loved.

Reminded of his treatment of his mother and father, Nancy's face grew hard, for she knew it was only too true that John Grant had brutally cast them off. When she heard her own name mentioned, her heart stood still.

Filled with sudden, angry shame, she seemed to forget the crowd around her. Her face crimson, she spoke up sharply.

"That's a lie!" she cried. "John Grant was nothing to me—nothing!"

CHAPTER XII

BENTON'S ULTIMATUM

A MOMENT later Nancy could have bitten out her tongue with shame and mortification. She turned away quickly, with every eye upon her. Speeding like a hunted thing from the scene, she felt a little less sorry. Rude and imperfect as her disclaimer had been, it had served her purpose with John Grant there listening, for it was to him she had really spoken.

And, looking back with scared eyes before she turned the first corner, Nancy saw that her unexpected interruption had brought a staggering change.

The man who had been speaking had stopped, utterly disconcerted, and in the silence the crowd split. Grant saw his opportunity then, and, restarting the car, he drove in at the gates that opened up at his approach. A storm of hisses and sullen shouts followed him, but the incident was at an end.

Nancy, meantime, hurried back to the Bentons' home.

The scene at Grant's still danced before her eyes. She felt that she had done a foolish thing, and that neither the crowd nor John had been deceived by her words.

Her own poor happiness had been shattered, and she felt, also, that John must be sorely disturbed,

and that the shock of his disillusionment must reflect on the happiness of the girl he had made his wife.

In a torture of dismay, Nancy pondered the matter over, seeking a means of restoring the lost balance to her own life and to John Grant's.

There was always the one sure way—to accept Lionel Benton's offer of marriage.

Nancy shrank from this unholy step, for loss of respect for the man who had already ruined her life had deepened into feelings of fear and loathing. Her better instincts urged her to leave the house without further delay and hide her crushed hopes afar off. But she could not make up her mind.

She tried to steel herself to the hateful union. After all, what did it matter? Love had gone out of her life with John Grant, and nothing could ever bring it back again. Lionel Benton wanted her, too. And there was Arthur, her brother.

Like an undercurrent ran her continual, harassing anxiety for the ne'er-do-well. Since their last meeting, when Mrs. Benton had come upon them and seen his condition, she had heard nothing of him. That he was in town somewhere, utterly helpless, and preparing for some further madness, she did not doubt.

Uneasy and tortured by anxiety about Arthur, as well as her own affairs, she lay awake far into the night.

Twelve o'clock had struck and she knew that it must be nearly one when she heard steps outside and a low murmur of voices which struck terror to her heart.

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She rose up and began to dress, scarcely cognizant of what she was doing.

Listening, with every nerve alert, Nancy heard a muffled noise somewhere below, and drew back, her heart leaping with fear. Then all was still again.

Presently she took her courage in both hands, and went nervously down the broad, carpeted stairs to the hall.

The need for a decision was suddenly and sharply forgotten. Looking toward the drawing-room door, she saw through a chink that the place was a blaze of light. As she stood there voices came to her.

Urged by a great fear, Nancy threw discretion to the winds, and had reached the door when it was swung open in her face, and, with a startled exclamation, the man who was on his way out, drew back a step.

"Nancy!" said Lionel Benton.

Nancy had no eyes for him just then. She looked beyond him into the room. The big window stood open, and, lying on his back in front of it, his arms securely bound, and a look of sullen, desperate resignation on his distorted face, was Arthur, her brother!

Nancy ran forward into the room. Then, suddenly, she stopped and turned round, white to the lips, to face Benton, who stood just behind her.

"What have you done?" she cried wildly.

He did not appear to be much put out. He pushed his hands into his pockets and stared at her with a curious mingling of malevolence and triumph.

"What have I done?" he mocked. "Can't you see? I was on my way here from the station when

I caught him, red-handed, breaking in. I didn't know who he was, nor did I care. Look, he had his hands on some of my mother's silver before I snaffled him!"

Nancy felt utterly helpless—knew, too, that it was all true.

"Hurry up! Get me out of this!" broke sullenly from the trapped man.

Benton did not take his eyes off the girl. His expression changed. A dull red color spread in his cheeks, and his eyes glittered with the thought that came to him.

"I was on the way to phone the police when you pounced in just now," he added significantly.

Nancy wavered, looking piteously from her helpless, wastrel brother to the man who dominated them both.

"I don't know what good you can do. Better go back to your room," Benton went on ruthlessly. "In any case, I'm going to hand this scoundrel over!"

"No, no—oh, please don't!" burst from the girl.

He stopped and looked at her for a moment from beneath contracted brows.

"Only on one condition—and you know what that is, Nancy," he said, in a low, meaning tone.

Nancy met his look, hesitating no longer.

"Very well. I will marry you!" she said.

Benton could hardly believe his ears. Recalling how the girl had shrunk from him hitherto, he had regretted his demand almost as soon as it was spoken. It had been a chance shot on his part, uttered with no little bitterness and the desire to pay her back for

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the rebuffs and humiliation he had suffered at her hands. He had looked for an angry outburst, a frantic, emotional appeal, perhaps, as she realized the price of her refusal.

Instead, she accepted his terms calmly.

"You mean this, Nancy?" he gasped, the long, stiff fight he had put up for her making her seem more than ever desirable.

"I have promised," she said simply.

Benton turned to Arthur Leigh, who still lay huddled against the wall, with his arms bound, gazing on the pair with apathetic interest. Since their conversation was in an undertone he did not catch what was said, but he had a vague idea that, as always, Nancy was once more accomplishing the seemingly impossible.

Benton undid his bonds, and he came shakily to his feet.

"Well, what's going to happen?" he said sullenly. His nervous gaze was fastened on his sister. She did not seem to be much concerned with him, however; her thoughts appeared to be elsewhere.

Benton was in the mood to be generous, but he was sharp enough to see that this wastrel might soon prove a thorn in his side. With a thrill, too, he felt that he had Nancy now to protect.

"I've changed my mind about the police," he said severely. "I'm going to give you a last chance. Clear out." Feeling for his pocketbook, he brought out some money. "Here, take this," he went on. "Get a decent suit and come and see me in the morning. I'll fix you up then."

Leigh looked dazed at this unexpected turn of events. He took the money with trembling hands, and his eyes once more sought his sister.

"Nancy——" he began, a shade alarmed.

Nancy would not look at him. She felt she hated her brother then; she would never forgive him. She saw him leave by the French window a moment later; saw Benton close the window and fasten it securely. He fumbled nervously with the curtains, and seemed to be gathering courage to face her once more in the light of their new understanding.

Nancy was apathetic. Nothing seemed to matter now. With hectic spots of color coming and going in her pale cheeks, she allowed her thoughts to flash, for an instant, to John Grant.

Soon he must know, and, deceived, forced into the belief that she was marrying Benton purely of her own volition, he must cast her out of his heart forever. It was best, she told herself. He, at least, might find happiness—he and the girl he had made his wife.

With a shiver she turned.

"Nancy——" cried Benton then, softly. He came quickly to her side and laid a hand on her arm. "You won't go back on your word? Remember, you're mine now—mine!"

"I don't think I'm likely to forget," she answered him, with a frightened look.

He still held her as if she doubted the fullness of his triumph.

"And you'll marry me soon?" he urged.

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"When you wish—it doesn't matter when," she told him.

"Nancy!" He suddenly tried to take her into his arms.

But Nancy eluded him. With a broken warning, she slipped past him and sped up to the sanctuary of her own room.

Her trembling hands locked together, she forced herself to look at the brutal facts; at the price she must pay.

Never for an instant did she consider the material gain that would be hers, as John Grant had done. Riches and position were only names to mock her. Deep down in her woman's heart was the everlasting cry for love, for the dear things in life that make for the only real happiness. But now these feelings were like the dying embers of a fire.

She crumpled down beside her bed, unable any longer to preserve that stoic, unnatural calm.

"I can't bear it!" she sobbed. "Oh, I'd rather die!"

But her promise had been given. There was no escape.

CHAPTER XIII

TUMULT

THE strike at Fenwick's was a short-lived affair. With the reinstatement of the head clerk the men went back to work, and the slandering tongues were stilled.

Grant had submitted to the men's demands; had, indeed, owned himself beaten. So it seemed, on the face of things. But Grant himself knew better.

With a struggle, he put on another mask. He knew he was playing the hypocrite now; that the test was one of cunning, not of brute strength.

On his way home he thought of Lucy. A thin, bitter smile twisted his lips.

Would he ever be able to forget the scene with Nancy Leigh at the shooting lodge, or the mad passion that had urged him to wring the truth from Lucy? Returning to town, remembering that this girl was his wife for good or ill, he had thrust the incident into the past to which it really belonged.

Coming into the hall, he paused. His wife was at the telephone. She looked up at his entrance, her eyes bright, a crimson flush in her face. Presently, while the footman was still helping Grant off with his coat, she hung up the receiver and turned to him.

Later she might have seen the indiscretion of telling him the news so abruptly, but now it thrilled and blinded her.

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"John, that was Lionel Benton," she announced. "What do you think? He and Nancy Leigh are going to be married—almost at once!"

Grant went very pale.

"Indeed!" Grant paused, as if he doubted the tidings. Then suddenly he turned on his heel and strode off into the library.

Alone, standing by the window, with his hands clasped behind him, he grappled with this new turn of events.

Nancy the wife of Lionel Benton!

Revolt swept him. He paced swiftly to and fro, hot with unrest and fear. There was something wrong somewhere. A wild impulse came, urging him to go to Nancy, to thrust aside the obstacles in the way, to force the truth from her; just to see her, to look into her eyes for an instant. Then he would know!

With an effort, he steadied himself. He was powerless.

A knock sounded on the door, and a footman appeared with a letter.

Grant took the thing—a cheap, soiled envelope, addressed in a woman's handwriting. Barely interested, he tore it open.

With a twinge of amazement and pain, he saw that it came from his sister-in-law, the mother of the kiddies he had so often gone to see and help in the old days.

DEAR JOHN: I hope you won't mind my writing to you this way, but wee Maisie is ter-

ribly ill, and I wondered if you could spare a minute to come and see her? She hasn't forgotten you, and, although she might not know you, she is crying that she wants you. It seems she saw you lately, in your car, somewhere in town. It might please her if you came—and, oh, I'm so worried, I hope you'll come!

MARY.

Grant crushed the letter in his hand, embittered afresh that such an appeal should come at a time when it was taking all his strength of will to shut out the past.

But he did not throw the letter aside. He looked at it again and slowly his eyes softened as he recalled the eager little face that had looked up into his that day at the florist's. The incident had haunted him for some time after. And now the kiddie was ill, seriously ill.

"Heavens, what shall I do?" It seemed folly to go; he could do no good, really. And, reminded of his old-time visits to the house, of Mary's gratitude for the little help he had given, and of the way he had vanished suddenly, leaving her to manage the best way she could, he recoiled from meeting her eyes and the wondering looks of the kiddies.

"I must! I will!" he decided in the end, and a little later he was eagerly on his way.

Dusk had set in. Furtively John made his way into the poor district where Maisie and her mother lived.

Stopping at one of the big stores, he bought a

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huge doll and other toys. Presently, a hot flush on his set face, he stood before the poor little home.

Maisie's mother looked upset, but very grateful, as she let him in.

"It's good of you, John. She'll be glad," was her simple greeting.

Grant stood for a moment in the tiny hall, looking into the room beyond. Accustomed to the airy, beautiful rooms at his new home, the place almost stifled him. The house was clean, as it always used to be, but how faded the floors and walls, and how shabby the poor furniture!

The two other children came to stare up into their uncle's face. They looked bewildered, afraid. Suddenly cut to the quick, Grant smiled at them, fondled their heads, and in a moment his long neglect was blotted out. They spoke to him, chided him, asked questions he hadn't the heart to answer.

Presently he was beside his little favorite. Maisie looked pitifully white and worn. She did not know him for a time. Then she cried:

"Uncle John!" Her big eyes brightened.

Grant laid the doll he had brought beside her on the pillow. He fought with a strange emotion, and, in spite of himself, his eyes grew misty, and a choking lump rose in his throat as he tried to speak to the sick child.

"Maisie, are you going to forgive me?" he pleaded huskily, going down on his knees beside the bed and taking the thin little hand into his strong clasp.

"Oh, she is so pleased and happy!" was wrung

from the mother, in a grateful whisper. And, a little later, "See, she's asleep. Thanks so much, John."

In the woman's last words he heard a tremulous warning. He turned his head. Then suddenly he was starting to his feet in profound dismay.

On the threshold, watching him, stood Nancy Leigh!

Hearing of the child's illness, Nancy had hurried over to the little home and had entered before it was possible to warn her. Seeing John Grant there, kneeling by the bed, her heart stood still.

"Nancy!"

Involuntarily, he had breathed her name as he stared at her. Nancy said nothing. She turned her head aside, overcome by the shock of finding him there.

And in that moment, looking into her pinched, wan face with its haggard eyes, John's worst fears were crystallized. He knew suddenly, beyond any doubt, that her approaching marriage to Benton was a terrible, terrible tragedy!

The revelation came to him like a physical blow. Seeing her pitiful efforts to deceive him, he was moved to great pity.

"Nancy——" he began again, and put a trembling hand out to her.

She turned abruptly to the sick bed, and went down on her knees beside little Maisie. She began to smile and talk in her old, cheerful way.

The spell was broken. John passed a hand over

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his brow, and meeting his sister-in-law's eyes, went to join her at the door.

"I'm sorry, John," she began timidly.

Grant frowned.

"About Maisie—we must get her out of this," he said. "What is the doctor's opinion? I'm frightfully sorry, really; I wish I had known sooner that she was so bad."

The woman shook her head. The child would be all right where she was, she insisted. She could not bear to let Maisie go out of her sight. Everything was being done that was within their power.

"Thanks for coming, John," she ended, gratefully enough, but looking away from him, as if the interview suddenly gave her pain.

Grant bit his lips. His hand went to his pocket-book, and he drew out a bundle of bills. After a moment's hesitation, he thrust the money toward the woman.

"Here—please take this," he said. "I shall never forgive you if you won't allow me to do something. Get her all she needs—good food, some fruit, or whatever you think best. And I think you ought to get out into the country."

The young mother wrung her hands.

"No, no, I don't want your money, John," she answered. "I didn't bring you here for that. I couldn't think of taking money from you, please!"

"Don't be so foolish. I insist," he said.

But he was met with a stubborn refusal. Maisie's mother turned aside; it was a sore temptation. A fraction of the money John offered her would have

been a godsend. There was so much she wanted to get for the sick child. But there were things she could not forget, and her pride was touched. She was taking no help from John Grant.

Grant looked around at Nancy. He might have been a hundred miles away for all the difference his presence was making to her. The hard look came back to his eyes; he returned the money to his pocket.

"Very well," he said curtly, though his heart was breaking. "I'd better go."

With a look at Mary that brought a sob to her throat, he gave her a brief good night and went back to the world to which he now belonged.

But that night it was like going back to prison.

CHAPTER XIV

"SAVE NANCY!"

WITH his fortunes once more restored, Arthur Leigh went on his way with a light heart. He was intelligent enough to appreciate the providential nature of his escape. Once more Nancy had plucked him from disaster; the announcement of her forthcoming marriage to Benton made it clear to him that this was the price Benton had demanded.

In spite of his many weaknesses, Arthur had some regard for the sister who had done so much for him. He was troubled when he heard the news. Recalling the scene when John Grant had come to demand his money, he knew that though Grant had scorned Nancy, his hard words had not killed her love. If Arthur had ever felt any incentive to do better, he had felt it then; had felt a desire to be able to face John Grant on his own ground, and take him to task.

Arthur nursed his wrath for a time, but he soon divined that he himself had been at the root of the trouble. Knowing the hopelessness of Nancy's position, he had wondered what she would do.

Benton had been very generous when he saw him last, but he had been authoritative in his tone. He had given him money for immediate needs, and, in addition, a ticket to San Francisco.

As the day of his departure drew near, Arthur went to see Nancy. She was very cold with him, and he could not help but notice the change that had come over her.

"You don't look happy, Nance," he said uneasily, feeling that this was, perhaps, the last time he would see her. "I begin to think that you don't want this man—that I am to blame for it all!"

"I shall be quite happy," Nancy assured him quickly, although the lie almost stuck in her throat. "And please don't think that I am doing this because of you."

After all, Arthur had only been one of her difficulties, and, had he not come to force her decision the other night, she had already made up her mind that the best course was to give herself to Benton.

Arthur was only half convinced. With a sigh, however, he gave up the riddle. He did not want to feel that there was anything wrong, since he could do nothing to right it. He might be Benton's cat's-paw, but he had no choice.

"Well, I shan't worry you any longer, old girl!" he told Nancy, as he left. She did not preach to him and beg him to turn over a new leaf, as she usually did after getting him out of a scrape, and he missed these evidences of her concern.

Well, he had nothing to worry about, he told himself, as he went down the street. Soon, he would be away from the old life with its privations. In the West he would make money and be able to hold up his head and have the best of times!

Later, he wondered if it was merely coincidence

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that the railway ticket Benton had given him was stamped with the date of Nancy's wedding day.

Two days beforehand, Arthur called at the railroad offices. Hearing that his train left New York very early in the morning, he decided to leave for New York the following night and was hurrying out through the big swing door when, suddenly, he drew up.

John Grant was passing.

For a moment or two neither spoke. Each looked his antagonism, but Arthur Leigh was the first to feel a sense of subjection. He did not like the queer, strained look on Grant's face, nor the glitter in his eyes.

"Well, what do you want with me?" the boy demanded. He made a move as if to pass the other, but a look from Grant held him back.

"Where are you going?" said John sharply.

"I don't see that it concerns you," was the answer. "I happen to be taking a little trip to the coast, if you're anxious to know!"

Grant had sized matters up by now. He understood that Lionel Benton was at the bottom of this move. Also that Leigh, who should really be in prison, owed his freedom and prosperity to the man Nancy was to marry. Knowing what Nancy would do to save her wastrel brother, he was struck suddenly by the conviction that this good-for-nothing Arthur had driven her into Benton's hands.

Since his unexpected meeting with Nancy by Maisie's sick bed, Grant had been living in a torment of remorse and helpless indignation. He had tried to

think that Nancy's actions were no longer of any importance to him. He knew, at least, that he had no right to interfere. But, deep down in his heart, he felt that Nancy's step was a catastrophe, to himself as much as to the girl.

The thought that she was giving herself to Benton brought a maddening sense of revulsion, and a terrible, sickening grief. The fatal day was drawing nearer, yet what could he do? All the best instincts in him urged him to do something, but the barriers were always before his eyes—insurmountable, impenetrable. He had no right. There was nothing he could do.

It was this sickening sense of his impotence that filled him as he faced Nancy's brother.

“And your sister—Nancy!” he flung out sternly.

“Why do you speak of her?” retorted Arthur, afraid, yet bitterly resentful. “Nancy's all right,” he went on spitefully. “She'll be as good as you are now, I reckon!”

Grant gripped him suddenly by the arm, and his eyes shone with disgust and exasperation.

“You good for nothing!” he flashed. “My God, can you remember all she's done for you, and stand by and see her sacrifice herself—for you? Can't you realize how desperate she must feel? She hates this man—loathes him! Benton is forcing himself upon her, worrying the life out of her. It will kill her to go on. Yet you don't care! You have driven her to it!”

Leigh shook himself free of Grant's grip, but his face went deathly pale. He knew suddenly that this

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was the truth, that Nancy was really selling her soul to buy him this freedom which he so ill deserved, and to send him out West with a few dollars in his pocket.

"Who are you to cast stones?" Arthur turned furiously on Grant. "God knows she's suffered a lot for me, but it is you, John Grant, who made her sick of life! Have you forgotten the dirty trick you played her? You ought to be ashamed to face even me and talk like this! Don't pretend to me you're sorry, and want to save her from this man!"

A spasm of pain crossed John's face. His hands clenched nervously, and his lips became a thin, bloodless line. He, too, was hearing the bare truth.

"I am not pretending," he said, with an earnestness that betrayed the emotion he felt. "Never mind the past. That can't be undone. But for God's sake do something to save Nancy before it's too late!"

Arthur was alive to the urgency of the appeal, but he felt that, if Grant was helpless, so was he. He turned, defiant.

"Why should I?" he said. "I don't see what I can do. Besides, I'm going away. And what can it matter to you, Grant?"

Grant felt the bitterness of the taunt, but he disregarded it as he realized that only through this man could anything be done to save Nancy.

"It matters this much, that I'd give everything I possess to stop this marriage," he answered. "I can do nothing. You can, if you will. It is your right, your duty, to stand by your sister. I have given up my right, I know. But you don't know how I feel

about it. Nancy dare not go on with this madness. You must stop it, before it is too late!"

Arthur Leigh stared at the man who had been his sister's sweetheart, and became speechless with surprise.

"It's already too late. I don't see what I can do!" he said presently, in a hopeless voice. And with a fierce look in his eyes he turned away.

CHAPTER XV

HER WEDDING EVE

IN spite of her common-sense views of life and her high opinion of Nancy's capabilities, Mrs. Benton nursed a bitter resentment at her son's choice of a wife. Her first natural thought was that Nancy had contrived the match, knowing the big advantages it must bring to her, but lately she had changed her view.

The girl's attitude puzzled her. She did not display any pleasure at her conquest, nor did she seem to be looking forward to her wedding with the customary joy and excitement of the engaged girl.

Nancy knew that she was being watched. She strove hard to kill the suspicion that she was unhappy, but, with the fatal day drawing near, her courage slowly deserted her.

Since she had no home of her own, it had been arranged that she should stay on with Mrs. Benton, Lionel taking up his quarters temporarily in town. Mrs. Benton, resigned to the inevitable, was kind enough. There was a good deal to do, she pointed out.

Lionel kept out of the way as much as possible, and it was this that helped Nancy to a feeling of resignation and security. How false were these feelings she soon realized. When her preparations were

almost complete, and there was nothing left to do but to wait on the swift passage of the hours, she awoke to the imminence of her fate like one starting from a bad dream.

Nothing could hide the telltale rings about her eyes, nor the deathly pallor of her cheeks. And, alone with Mrs. Benton one afternoon, the terrible truth was wrung from her.

"I cannot help thinking, Nancy, that you are unhappy," Mrs. Benton said. "What is troubling you?"

Nancy fought back the helpless tears that came to her eyes. For a moment, urged by the woman's kindness, she was tempted to pour out all that was in her heart. But she saw that such a course would be mean and unworthy of her, and that Lionel's mother would only shrink from her in amazed indignation.

She was able to tell part of the truth, however.

"Oh, I feel that all this is a mistake!" she cried. "I was mad to give way. Lionel will only hate me afterward. He will regret marrying a girl like me, when he might have done so much better. And you, who have been so kind to me—oh, I know that you don't like the idea of my being Lionel's wife!"

Mrs. Benton was a level-headed person, but Nancy's outburst disturbed her greatly. She felt that there was more in the girl's distress than she elected to say.

"Come, you mustn't look at it in that way," she protested, her hand taking Nancy's into a reassuring clasp. "I admit that, at first, I was a shade disap-

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pointed—I am perfectly frank, you see. But I have come to the conclusion that Lionel might have done a great deal worse. You are just the kind of capable girl he needs. He is a trifle unsteady, I'm ashamed to say, but you are just the woman to be a real help to him. I'm sure this isn't a whim. He loves you, and you need not be afraid for the future, my dear."

Had it not been for her recent unnerving meeting with John, Nancy might have been encouraged to go on with things. But she could only rise up now in a tempest of indecision and dread.

"It is wrong," she insisted. "Oh, won't you please see him, and ask him to change his mind? He will regret it, I know, and so shall I!"

The incident ended there. Nancy left the room, afraid that she must break down utterly and tell the woman the whole sordid story of how her promise had been forced from her—that she actually hated and feared the man she was to marry.

Benton came to her next day, when she was alone.

"What's this you have been saying to mother?" he said, with a trace of anger. "I don't know what she thinks, but you're making me look a sorry spectacle. If you have no respect for yourself, remember that you are to be my wife!"

Nancy answered him with a flush in her cheeks.

"I urged her to do something for your own sake, not for me," she said. "You needn't be afraid, or ashamed." Then, with her whole heart in her appeal, she went on, "Oh, don't you see how badly you are treating me? I can never, never love you. I

cannot even respect you. Please try to see how much it will make me hate you, before it is too late."

"That's enough!" he cut in, with fury. "You've talked this way till I'm tired. I don't care if you do hate me. I want you. You gave me your promise and I mean to keep you to it. Later, we'll see. I think you'll take a different view!"

Nancy shrank from him then. His last words were spoken like a threat. Lately, when he felt that she was securely in his grasp, Benton had shown her the stuff of which he was made. Spoiled and petted in his younger days, he had grown up into a selfish bully, who wanted all he set his heart upon, and did not care how he obtained it. Nancy realized that very soon he would tire of her and cast her aside.

That day passed, and the next, Then, with a sickly apathy, Nancy woke up to the fact that it was her wedding eve.

How the thought tortured and mocked at her! Once, she had associated such a day with untold happiness—and John Grant. In spite of herself, her mind went back to the old days, but only for a blinding instant. With a shudder, she shut out the poignancy of the might-have-been.

Everything was ready. The minutes, the hours, flew past. Soon the morning would dawn, the step from which there was no drawing back would be taken. She saw herself before the altar, Lionel Benton by her side, impatient at the formalities, anxious only to take her away and feel that she was his own.

She could not feel any more lonely or desperate

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than she did now, while she was still free, while there was still a ghostly chance!

Mrs. Benton kissed her good night at length, and held her for a moment with anxious, questioning gaze.

"You mustn't worry any more, my dear," she said. "Just make up your mind that you are going to be happy, and that you are doing what is best."

Like a hunted thing, Nancy fled upstairs to her own room. "Doing what is best." The words seemed to convey a message to her. Was she doing what was best—in spite of her promise? It was not only herself she sought to save. The red lights of danger were everywhere, but Benton willfully blinded his eyes to their warning.

Nancy remained for a time in a stupor of indecision. Then, as the hour of midnight was upon her, reminding her that her wedding day was here, panic seized her.

Terror-stricken, she gathered together a few odds and ends. Then, when she found herself going out at the door, she recalled Mrs. Benton. Touched to quick remorse, she returned to the desk in her room and sat down to pen a hurried note.

Forgive me. I am going away because I feel that to go on with things would drive me mad. I would rather kill myself than marry your son. I could never even respect him. I only hate him for what he has forced me to do, for suffering things to go so far in spite of all my entreaties. Believe me, this is best. Good-by, and thanks for all your kindness to me. NANCY LEIGH.

Then hastily she collected a few of her most valued possessions, and put them into a small trunk.

Perhaps when she knew where to send it, Mrs. Benton would forward it to her.

As she looked round her room for the last time, tears came to Nancy's eyes. Why was it that she could not be happy like other girls? Why was it that something always happened to drive her from the situations where she had thought to find happiness? If only she had never met Lionel Benton!

Blind with fear, she sped downstairs. She turned for a moment to lay her letter on the hall table, where some one would be bound to see it, and then, with a great breath of relief, she slipped out at the door.

But suddenly, as she paused for an instant before hurrying down the path toward the gate, a startling thing happened.

Into the tranquil night, with the stars drawing shadows everywhere, came the sharp crack of firearms!

Nancy's heart stood still. The shot was very near, just beyond the hedge, and the sound that came with it made her sick with horror—the heavy thud of a falling body.

Then, knowing that she dared not turn back, dared not linger a moment longer, Nancy went out at the gate and into the road. Her eyes traveled along the hedge in the direction whence the noise had come. And suddenly she found herself drawn toward the huddled form that lay there.

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With dilating eyes, she verified her terrible suspicion.

The man who lay at her feet was—Lionel Benton! There was blood on his face, and he did not appear to breathe. A cry of alarm was wrung from the girl.

Was it murder?

Frozen with horror, Nancy continued to stare at the form of the man who, that morning, was to have led her to the altar. Then, with a shudder, she looked up and down the road, at a loss how to act. Subconsciously she realized that there was no longer any need for flight—that the marriage would never take place now.

Then, just as a cry was struggling to her lips, she noticed something bright lying almost at her feet. With a gasp, she stooped and picked up the object, a heavy, old-fashioned revolver. The smell of burnt powder still clung to the weapon.

And more: almost in the same instant, Nancy recognized the revolver as one that had belonged to her own father. It had hung on the wall in the old home.

Swiftly, as she held the thing in shivering hands, came a hideous suspicion. Her thoughts flew to her brother, Arthur, who alone could have been in possession of the weapon.

Arthur must have done this terrible deed!

Gripped in numb horror, Nancy dropped on her knees beside Benton's huddled form. Wild-eyed, she searched his face. She called on him by name, be-

sought him to speak to her. She saw that he still breathed, and prayed fervently that he might not die.

"What shall I do? What can I say?" she cried, wringing her hands in panic.

Steps sounded on the gravel, and a door opened near by, throwing a broad beam of light across the road. Then, stumbling to her feet, with the revolver half hidden in her hands, Nancy saw a policeman, and into the light came other figures.

Nancy withdrew into the shadow of the trees, leaving the pistol and a glove by the side of the wounded man.

A hasty examination was made.

"Looks dangerous, but he's still alive. Quick—there's a doctor across the way. Mind running over?" said the policeman.

Nancy heard the scuttle of feet as a man dashed off for medical aid.

"Good God!" broke from the policeman, as he picked up the revolver. "Young Benton! Attacked just outside his own gate."

"Better rouse his people," said the man of the law, turning swiftly to a curious onlooker. He pointed to the house and still kept his searching, troubled gaze on the huddled form.

The doctor came hurrying over and, with the policeman, bent over the stricken man. They spoke rapidly, in bated voices. Another door opened and closed, and then came the clang of a gate and other speeding steps on the graveled walk.

"My son? Where? Oh, what has happened?" came a woman's stricken voice.

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Nancy huddled by the hedge as the distraught mother came up and knelt beside her son. The doctor and the policeman still looked on, the former giving hurried instructions and, a moment later, drew Mrs. Benton aside, preparatory to having the wounded man carried to the house.

Nancy took her chance; not knowing what she was doing, she sought the line of least resistance. On a sudden blind impulse she slipped furtively away, moving like a hunted thing.

In a new access of terror, she recalled the letter she had left behind. Presently that would be found, and what interpretation might it not put upon her presence on the scene of the crime; and, subsequently, her flight?

She prayed that Lionel Benton would not die, and fought against the terrible thought of the load on her conscience if the worst did happen. But, high as the price had been, she was saved.

Nancy wandered on aimlessly, until, at last, feeling that her quaking limbs must give way beneath her, she turned her steps in the direction of her only refuge, the house where she had last seen John Grant—little Maisie's home.

Maisie's mother was frightened by the girl's strained, deathly face.

"I have run away. I could not bear to stay in that house," said Nancy simply, at a loss how much to tell her friend. "Please let me rest and think!"

"But your wedding, Nancy?"

"Don't talk about it, please," was the shuddering answer. "It will never, never take place!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEXT DAY

IN his lighted study John Grant sat huddled up in his easy-chair. He did not think of going to bed. There could be no rest for him this night, for he knew that there would be none for Nancy Leigh.

Could nothing be done, even at the eleventh hour?

With maddening conviction, he saw that whatever chance he might have had was gone; that he was powerless; that any attempt to interfere would be treated with the scorn and indignation it deserved.

Arthur had been his only hope, and the wastrel, as might have been expected, had failed.

At daybreak he was still in the study. He switched off the electric light at length and, throwing up the blinds, stared out into the mocking sunshine.

Nancy's wedding morn!

Before Lucy appeared downstairs, he took a bath, dressed and prepared to go out. The servants were astir in the kitchen and in the dining room. Tradesmen came to the door, and with them came the morning papers.

Lingering in the hall, with only a half-formed idea of what he intended to do, Grant saw that it was still very early, that, even if he meant to follow out his mad resolve to see Nancy once more, face to face, before she left the Bentons' house, there was still ample time.

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He picked up one of the newspapers eagerly, as the wild hope came that he might see some announcement of a change in plans. There was none. But, under heavy headlines, he saw a familiar name.

SENSATIONAL AFFAIR IN WEST END. WELL-KNOWN MAN FOUND SHOT. ASSAILANT ESCAPES.

While on his way to the residence of his mother, at midnight, Mr. Lionel Benton, a popular young man in society and sporting circles——

So the report began. With incredulous eyes, Grant read it through. So far, there was nothing much to tell, beyond the fact that the shot had evidently been aimed with murderous intent and that Benton was still unconscious and in a grave condition. As to the identity of the assailant, nothing was said. It was remarked, however, that the revolver had been recovered, and, further, that a sensational arrest was imminent.

Grant was stunned by the news. When his mind began to clear he fastened on the last sentence of the paragraph—the expected “sensational arrest.”

In a flash he tumbled to the identity of the man who had done the deed: who else but Arthur Leigh, Nancy's brother?

Grant was breathing heavily, his face strained and his eyes dilated with the sudden horror of the thing, and the consuming thought that it was his mind that had prompted the crime. Arthur Leigh, after all,

had not failed, but this desperate act was the last resort of a madman!

But it was hardly of the brother that Grant thought.

What did Nancy believe? What did she know?

Warned by a movement upstairs Grant went out, to avoid having to discuss the sensation with Lucy.

Obedying the reckless impulse that had been born overnight, he bent his steps toward the Bentons' house. At the worst, if he did not see Nancy, he could at least talk to Lionel's mother and learn what was happening.

The woman came to him in the morning room. Her face looked very pale, her eyes nervous and red rimmed. She just touched the hand that John put out to her.

"He is alive, yes," she said, answering his unspoken question. "The doctors have just operated, and they are a little more confident of his pulling round."

"I am sorry for you," said Grant in his direct way. Then, after an uncomfortable pause, observing that Mrs. Benton was in no mood for callers, he went on, "I have only read about it, of course. Have you any idea who could have committed such an outrage?"

The woman looked up with a sudden fierce light in her eyes.

"I have," she said.

"And Nancy——" began Grant, floundering in dread anxiety.

"Don't mention her name, if you please!" cried

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Lionel Benton's mother. "Perhaps I shouldn't be so hard on the girl, though," more quietly. "I dare say the police have found her by this time, and she already regrets such a mad act."

Grant stood for a moment paralyzed with horror. Then wildly he clutched at the woman's arm.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"Yes," went on Mrs. Benton more calmly. "I don't know how we are to face the scandal. Nancy undoubtedly did this terrible thing! She went out last night, just before the shot was fired. They evidently met and quarreled. Oh, please do not think I am talking wildly! Nancy was really running away from my son—from to-day's ceremony. Indeed, she left a note for me, which the police have in their hands. She declared that she would rather kill herself than go on with the marriage. She was desperate—mad!"

"I do not believe it. It's a dreadful lie!" His lips were parched. He might have said more, urged by the fierce, protective instinct that began to surge in his veins. But Mrs. Benton could bear the strain no longer, and, turning away from him, she left the room.

In little Maisie's home brightness mingled with tragedy. The sunshine, pouring in at the kitchen window, found Nancy with the little girl in her arms. Maisie was almost well again and, with the other kiddies, hailed Nancy's unexpected visit with joy.

Nancy hid the pain that was eating into her heart. Her great, shadowy eyes sought and held Mary's

she went to and fro with the work of the day. Nancy had summoned her courage and told her everything.

While making allowances for the shock the girl must have sustained, the woman urged the necessity for going back; the police would be sure to want her for evidence, especially if the worst happened to Lionel Benton. Never for an instant did the suspicion occur to her that Nancy's innocence might be in question.

Nancy saw the wisdom of this advice.

"I will go now," she told her friend.

White to the lips, and trembling with the ordeal in front of her, she put on her hat and coat. She was ready to set out, and was stooping to give the children a farewell kiss, when suddenly there came a sharp knock on the outer door.

She started, her eyes dilating with foreboding, her heart seeming to stand still.

She heard a stifled cry from Mary. Leaving the kiddies then, she hurried into the little hall.

Two men stood at the door, one of them in uniform!

"The police!" said Mary, looking at Nancy with scared eyes. She stood aside as the girl came forward to face the men.

"Miss Nancy Leigh?" questioned the one in plain clothing—obviously a detective—and he took a step across the threshold toward the girl.

"What do you want with me?" said Nancy, agonized dread shining in her eyes.

"I want you to come along with me," announced

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the officer. "I have a warrant here for your arrest on suspicion of having shot Mr. Lionel Benton, with intent to kill!"

For a moment hectic spots of color glowed in the girl's white cheeks; she swayed a little, and might have fallen had not the officer put out a hand to her. He retained his hold on her arm.

"Come!"

"But—he is not dead?" gasped Nancy.

"Oh, no, but there's no knowing!" was the response.

Nancy held back for an instant, the terrible shame of her position suddenly, like an icy hand, clutching her heart. She shook her head wildly.

"You are making a mistake! I did not do it!" she cried.

"Perhaps not," was the laconic rejoinder, "but I've got to take you back with me all the same. Come."

Nancy turned for a moment to the horrified Mary. She laid a fluttering hand on her arm, and tried to smile. And Maisie's mother knew that she need have no fear; that, whatever Nancy did behind her mask of calm resignation, the girl was innocent of this hideous crime.

The little procession moved quickly away, Nancy walking between her stalwart escorts with wide, pitiful eyes that saw naught of her surroundings, and seemed only to gaze into the future in an effort to discover what it might hold for her.

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN GRANT'S ORDEAL

THE startling sequel to the shooting outrage was soon published abroad. The evening papers reported Nancy's arrest and her brief appearance before the magistrate that morning, when she was remanded for further inquiries. All the details of the accused girl's relationship to the man she was alleged to have shot, and the fact that their marriage was to have taken place that morning were brought into the lime-light.

BENTON'S FIANCEE ARRESTED. PRISON
INSTEAD OF ALTAR. GIRL IN COURT.

So ran the headlines. The town buzzed with the sensation; people talked of nothing else.

So far there was little beyond the bald announcement of the arrest and Nancy's fleeting appearance in court. There was nothing to shed any light on the mystery.

"The accused girl looked pale and haggard, and seemed to feel her position keenly," said the reports. "Speaking on her behalf, her lawyer announced that, at that stage, his client elected to make no statement."

To John Grant this was the vital thing. Nancy had nothing to say; she made no attempt to clear herself, or to offer any explanation.

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Just how much she had told her lawyer he could not guess, but it seemed to him that Nancy's mind was made up to keep her lips sealed and suffer this ignominy and shame in silence, for her wastrel of a brother.

In his office at the yard, where he read the news, Grant clenched his hands in dumb, helpless despair. It would be easy, he saw, to go to the police and tell them of his suspicions, his conviction that Arthur Leigh had been the real perpetrator of the crime. But he could give no evidence to substantiate such a wild statement—unless he incriminated himself!

Grant's conscience was torn. This was his only evidence—the recital of his last conversation with Nancy's brother, when he had urged him to do something, however late, to save his sister. His was the brain that had prompted the deed, and it was at his bidding that Arthur Leigh had gone out with murder in his heart!

Even then, such was his remorse, Grant would not have stopped, but he was held back by a powerful, invisible hand, that pointed to Nancy's great sacrifice and her obvious desire for silence.

Only when his car bore him through the gates of his home did he wake up to the feeling that this was the last place in which he should have come in his present mood.

Everything was done mechanically to-day, however; he lived as in a dream—or a nightmare.

Coming into his study he strove to steady himself. He saw the necessity for going on the way he had chosen; he dare not let Lucy see what was in his

mind and heart. But the silence was electric to-night, like the brooding hush before the storm breaks loose.

That the matter was bound to be alluded to seemed inevitable, and the opportunity came presently, when at a nod from Grant the servants withdrew.

"You have heard how—how Lionel is?" Lucy ventured, her voice shaky and strained in the sudden quiet that came over the room.

"I called on Mrs. Benton this morning, yes," was Grant's reply, and with lowering brows he added, "I'm not concerned with Benton, however!"

Lucy changed color and, unwisely, chose to be resentful.

"How can you speak like that, John?" she said. "I think it a dreadful affair. Such a disgrace for the Bentons, too. That girl——"

Suddenly the storm was let loose. Grant tried to control himself, but with Lucy harping on the one note—her anxiety for the Bentons—and daring to test his attitude toward Nancy Leigh, he could stand it no longer. Pushing back his chair he leaped to his feet.

"How dare you speak like that?" he cried fiercely. "Do you want the truth? Well, you know it! Nancy Leigh did not do this thing, and even if she had could you blame her?"

"John!" Lucy would have bitten out her tongue to recall her words. She went white as a sheet, staring up into his face in fear and entreaty.

Grant had no thought then for the tie that bound

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him to this girl. He saw only her callousness where Nancy was concerned, and her treachery and deceit.

"Could you blame her?" he repeated, his tone like the lash of a whip. "Don't pretend any longer. I know the whole sordid story—how this coward was forcing Nancy against her will, how she was driven into his hands—with your connivance and help!"

"How dare you say that!" Lucy came to her feet and faced him, with panic-stricken eyes. Her words were less a rebuke than a desperate attempt to save herself. She clutched at the back of her chair to steady herself.

Grant laughed mockingly.

"I mean it—every word," he flung at her ruthlessly. "You played your cards well, didn't you? But you didn't count on such an outcome as this. Between you and Benton the girl's life has been ruined—and mine! That's about all."

Lucy was tongue-tied before this terrible, impassioned outburst. There was madness in John's eyes as he flung the truth at her. A sob rose in her throat, a sob of dismay and terror and helplessness. Then, afraid only that he would go on with his denunciation, and stricken with the disaster that had overtaken her, she hung her head and went blindly from the room.

That same night she left the house silently, leaving no word as to her destination. Grant knew next day that she had gone, but he did not ask questions. Somehow, he did not care.

He went to the jail and tried to get permission to speak to Nancy, to offer his assistance in extricating

her from this dreadful affair. This interview, however, was refused.

Still hesitating what to do next, he was standing by his car when suddenly he saw the lawyer who had Nancy's case in hand.

Urged by a new resolve, he spoke to the man, whom he knew slightly. His offer of a lift to his office was accepted; they climbed into the car.

"Look here, there's a fiendish mistake being made!" John broke out, as they sped off. "Nancy Leigh is as innocent of this business as you or I."

The lawyer spread his hands and sighed.

"I quite agree with you. I am convinced," he said. "But what am I to do? Wild horses will not drag from the girl all that she does know, and things are black against her. She was seen beside Benton, with the revolver actually in her hand—one that belonged to her family, too. Besides, there is that damning letter she left for Benton's mother. I cannot understand it, but she had her mind made up to escape from the wedding at any cost, and, as fate would have it, she was effecting her escape when the thing happened. What more convincing?"

Grant hardly heard.

"I know all that," he rejoined, then went on fiercely: "Can't you see that the real culprit is being forgotten, getting off scot-free? Arthur Leigh——"

Then Grant's belief was perilously near to being dashed to pieces.

"Ah, the brother has not been overlooked as you imagine," broke in the lawyer. "Arthur Leigh proved to have a bad reputation, and—more so than his

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sister—it was thought that the revolver had been in his possession. On that point no reliable evidence could be found. It has been clearly established, however, that he went on with his intention of proceeding to New York on the night of the shooting, and that he left for the West on the morning following. There is absolutely no evidence against him, and is it likely that he would go his way as if nothing had happened, if he knew his sister's position?"

"Obviously, I think he does not know, although he's cad enough for anything!" Grant broke out in bitter disappointment.

"I'm afraid the brother is out of the picture," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "Everything, of course, depends on a statement from Benton himself."

Driven to interference, and finding, after all, that his effort was in vain, Grant was at his wits' end. Whichever way he turned, he found himself up against a stonewall of defeat and impotence. Nancy Leigh was his world, infinitely more so in these dark days than in the old. He saw her crushed, shamed, with no glimmer of hope to light the future for her. Poor, sensitive Nancy, how much she had suffered, and was still enduring! And all for others, who deserved no sympathy!

Every minute was an eternity of suspense and agony for John Grant. He went to his office at the yard; came away again. He wandered aimlessly to and fro, thinking, planning, but always in a circle that led nowhere.

With the coming of another long night, he turned at last toward home.

He was forgetting Lucy, the woman who was his wife. She had left the house suddenly. Had she returned? With a short, bitter laugh, he decided that it would be like her to creep back and pretend that nothing untoward had happened. To-night, he did not care.

Then, as he came into the hall, a servant approached him with a telegram.

Grant tore the thing open absently. As he read, Nancy was forgotten. Imperiously, came another call.

The telegram came from friends in another part of the State. It read as follows:

Lucy here. A son born. Come at once.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BOND BETWEEN

A SON born to him and to Lucy! In his study, John Grant sank into a chair, and tried to see what this sudden news meant to him. Coming at such a time, when his mind was in a turmoil and his heart torn for Nancy Leigh, the import of the message struck him like a physical blow. He read between the lines, realized how Lucy had taken his condemnation to heart. His bitter words had doubtless hastened her illness; they had not expected it so soon.

A feeling almost of awe settled upon him. Only now did he see how cruel he had been to the woman who, after all, was his wife, and, whatever her failings, had first claim upon him. He had driven her away from her own home, the home she had sacrificed so much to let him share. He had tried to tell himself that his reproaches were deserved, that Lucy would not take them too much to heart, and that, presently, she would come back to him.

This message brought the truth home to him. Lucy loved him; his accusations had dealt her a crushing blow. And, now, while she sought to hide her distress and shame, she was making a woman's greatest sacrifice for him.

Grant was intelligent enough to understand what

she must be suffering, how her pride, her wonder and joy, at bringing this little life into the world must be clouded and marred by her thoughts of him! Scorned, despised by him, what must her feelings be at such a time?

With fluttering fingers he again spread out the telegram. There was no word as to the condition of the young mother.

Grant paced to and fro across the carpet, a flush on his cheek, his strong jaws squared. He felt a cad, a coward, afraid and ashamed suddenly to take the step that would bring him to Lucy, dreading that she might be very ill. Then, through the turmoil of emotion that swept him, he became conscious of a strong undercurrent—a belated sense of pride and wonder, and of a new, great responsibility.

He stirred himself. It was very late, too late to think of catching a train. But he was in no mood to live the night through with this on his mind, every minute an eternity of suspense. Lucy would be thinking of him, needing him. He rang the bell and handed a servant a message to telegraph.

Leaving at once. Hope all well. Yours devotedly,
JOHN.

Then, with the flush of excitement deep on his cheeks, he recalled the servant. He gave messages for the chauffeur and the housekeeper. And, when the latter personage bustled up, he even smiled as he broke the glad tidings to her.

"I have wonderful news. This home has now an heir," he announced. "Get everything in readiness.

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Mrs. Grant will probably return in a short time, with our son. I shall advise you as soon as I know definitely. Be ready, however."

Amazement kept the woman speechless. She had never seen Grant in such a mood. His habitual stern calm had deserted him; he was "all on the jump," pleased, excited, but at the same time terribly worried. When she did offer to speak, to utter a respectful word of congratulation, Grant had turned away from her.

Hastily he made preparations for the long night journey. The big, gray car appeared outside the front door, its glaring lamps shooting long shafts of light into the dusk. The mystified chauffeur was ready at the wheel in obedience to his master's peremptory summons.

Grant appeared. He stood in the light for a few moments, talking brusquely to the man. The address he gave was over a hundred miles away, but it might have been no farther than the yard from his matter-of-fact tone.

"Get there as quick as you can!" he ordered.

The car sped off on its midnight ride and, settling against the soft cushions, Grant gave himself up to reflection on the wonderful news and the stern resolution which it had awakened in him.

In his anxiety over Nancy, he had forgotten his more real and pressing obligations—the duty he owed to the girl he had made his wife. He had forgotten all that Lucy had done for him. Had she not made his ambitions possible, given him all that

money could buy? More, she had given her whole heart, her life, into his keeping.

He had been mad these last few days, he kept telling himself; he had been playing with fire, a fire that was likely to consume all the honor that was left to him, and his self-respect into the bargain.

It was still dark, but birds were beginning to stir in the white mist that spread over the countryside, when the last mile was completed.

The car ran up a short drive, and came to a stop before the low-built house, with an old-fashioned little church nestling among the trees close by. Anxiously he searched the windows overhead, wondering which was Lucy's.

A wide-eyed servant appeared presently.

"My wife—how is she?" he rapped out. "Take me to her, please!"

Then he saw the nurse at the top of the stairs. The woman seemed to know who he was, since she came down a few steps to beckon him, at the same time sending a mute message of reassurance.

"She is very weak, but she was awake, and guessed you had come," she told him. "Be very gentle with her. Perhaps your presence will help her more than anything."

"It will—it must!" thought John Grant.

He was shown into the dimly lit room and, as he entered, Lucy turned her head on the pillow. Her eyes looked unnaturally big in her thin, white face, she threw him just one glance, half in terror, half in pitiful appeal.

In a moment Grant was on his knees beside her,

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his arm about her shoulders. She would not look at him at first; she hid away from him, rather, crying softly at the sudden break in the tension, and with the incredible joy that John had indeed forgiven her.

"Lucy, darling, look at me—see how sorry I am, how repentant!" cried John shakily. "I was brutal, mad. I forgot so much, and I did not mean all I said. Forgive me."

Impulsively she turned to him, laid her burning cheek against his strong, cool hand, looked up into his appealing face, with the wonder of his words, of his strange humility, shining in her great eyes.

"John, I wanted you—terribly," she confessed. "I was afraid, ill. Then—then——"

Tenderly, she turned to the pillow and lifted aside the cover, disclosing the pink little morsel of humanity that made a new, wonderful world for her—and for him. The mite was asleep, but stirred as if he felt the vital currents that played about him, the profound, if mute, messages that flashed from heart to heart. He pushed out a tiny fist, and, watching with breathless interest, John Grant seemed to find in it the eighth wonder of the world. A smile broke out on his face—the happiest smile of his arduous, ambitious life.

His child—his and Lucy's!

Almost reverently, he covered up the child and once more sought the mother's tender eyes. For a long moment neither spoke; their hearts were too full. He held Lucy's white hand in a strong, reassuring clasp.

"And you, my poor girl—you are all right? You will get strong again soon?" he whispered.

"John, you don't know how happy you have made me!" she answered with tears in her eyes. She clung to him. "Our baby means so much—it seems so wonderful. But I wanted you, dear. Without you this would not have mattered. I should have wanted only to die!"

"Darling girl, forget—forgive me," he entreated.

And, as presently he went softly from the chamber, he knew that he had made amends, that the cloud was dispelled and that Lucy would have every chance. A great thankfulness swelled his heart, a new thrilling pride and joy.

Finding the nurse, he learned that Lucy was really very ill, but that everything possible was being done to insure her complete recovery. His coming, his continued presence, was the best medicine, so he gave up all intention of returning to town. At the moment, Lucy and the child made up his world. He did not want to think of anything else.

And Lucy was supremely happy. It seemed that the impossible happened, that John's heart had at last responded to the devotion and longing in her own. The child had wrought this miracle; his coming had forged the link between her and her husband, which would hold them ever together, and henceforward she need have no fear.

John Grant stayed several days with his wife and child. Only one thing marred the joy that had come to him: Lucy had paid a big price to bring their son into the world. In spite of the best surgical aid, it

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looked as if she was to be an invalid for the rest of her days.

Then came an urgent call back to the many affairs that claimed him at the yard. Reminded of the trouble he had left behind, he felt like one awakened from a dream. His cold, matter-of-fact world rose up to haunt him—and also that part of it to which Nancy Leigh belonged.

Arranging for everything to be in readiness at home for the reception of the mistress and the heir, Grant hurried back to town.

On the way he fought a fierce, inner battle with his new resolution. He had decided that he dare not attempt again to see Nancy; that, for good or ill, the girl must work out her own destiny. But no effort of will could shut out his anxiety as to her fate.

With every mile that was covered on the way to town, his nerves took on a keener edge. He wanted to know the worst, if only to get it over. What he would do, how he would feel, he did not guess. Only—was poor helpless Nancy to suffer for this dastardly crime? Had she spoken?

As the car raced through the outskirts of the town, Grant obeyed a sudden impulse and ordered his chauffeur to drive round by the Bentons' place. If only out of politeness, it was his duty to see Mrs. Benton and to make inquiries about her son.

As it happened, Mrs. Benton had just left the house and had taken her seat in her own car when Grant was borne swiftly alongside.

"What is the news?" he said, observing that she

still looked white and worried, and that she was clearly not too pleased to see him.

"Lionel is out of danger—so much so that he has been able to explain what happened," was Mrs. Benton's response.

Grant expressed a word of pleasure. "And—and the girl?" he went on, his voice suddenly losing its steadiness, his eyes fixed searchingly on the woman's face.

"You have not heard, then?" said Mrs. Benton, raising her voice and her brows in a way that suggested that she expected Grant to be already fully aware of the news. "Lionel made a statement clearing Nancy Leigh. If she is not already at liberty she should be any minute."

Grant could not hide his great relief; it shone in his eyes, in the hot flush that swept to his brow, in the tone in which he spoke.

"I am glad—glad!" he cried. "I knew there was a mistake. Nancy is not the type of girl to commit——" Then, suddenly meeting Mrs. Benton's cold look, he was brought up with a jerk. He wondered what the woman knew, or suspected, just how much Lionel had told her.

"Then they know who the guilty one is?" he said, expecting to hear Arthur Leigh's name.

Mrs. Benton shook her head as she sank back against the cushions of her car. Her tone was distant, secretive.

"I am afraid that is still a matter of conjecture," was her answer. "In any case it was not Nancy Leigh. Not that the girl is altogether blameless,"

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she added irritably. "I'm sure she is at the root of all the trouble! Good day, Mr. Grant."

The flush remained in John's face for some time. Precisely what Mrs. Benton knew, it was difficult to say, but it was evident that she had heard of his association with Nancy in the past, and his keen anxiety of the last week must have had only one meaning for her. And it was not only this woman; other people must know, or get to hear his sordid story.

Grant sought at length to throw off the weight that pressed upon him. The folly of his interference in Nancy's affairs was now clear to him. It had not only been futile, he had made himself foolish.

Well, this must be the end. Nancy had been saved this crushing ignominy. He had known that she was innocent, and his heart had gone out to her. Now that the end he had sought had been attained, his interest, his anxiety, must cease.

Henceforth, the past must be a closed book, its regrets and pain, its bitter-sweet memories hidden away. His future was clearly laid down for him; he must live for Lucy and the mite of humanity she had brought into the world—his son, who one day would step into his shoes and carry on the race he had set out to run.

CHAPTER XIX

A SOUL IN TORMENT

ONCE more, Nancy was dragged into the hideous publicity of the court, but, this time, to hear a hopeful message and the sympathetic acclamations of the crowded public gallery.

While Lionel Benton's statement was being read, Nancy betrayed a feverish interest. A storm of emotion swept her as she waited in vain for the dreaded allusion to her brother Arthur. He was not mentioned. Her brain in a whirl, she listened with averted face as the old magistrate proceeded to dismiss the case against her. She hardly understood all he said, but his altered tone, its kindness and pity, stabbed at her heart and brought a rush of hot tears to her eyes.

"Justice demands that the innocent should very often suffer for the guilty," were words that came to her, and, for an instant, she looked up.

They did not know that it was her own brother for whom she had suffered this disgrace. But Benton must have known. Had he willfully refused to tell them? Nancy was conscious of a new disturbance within her, a conflict of strange emotion.

They let her out into the open presently by a door at the back, an official telling her with a smile that a

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demonstrative crowd waited her at the front. Nancy hurried away from the drab place. She did not want to be congratulated and pitied, although her heart warmed at the thought that once more people believed in her.

The new anxiety that had come to her in the court still obsessed her. Why had Benton not spoken? There could be no doubt in his mind as to the hand that had wreaked this vengeance upon him. Nancy felt a new shame; a new, aching sense of responsibility. She wondered if she had been fair toward Benton.

It was evident that he meant to shield her brother, and in doing this, protect her. Probably he did not know yet that she had come away on her wedding eve determined not to marry him. Did he still count upon her? Would he want her to go on with the marriage?

Nancy found little reason to doubt this, and the thought that Benton was bearing his injuries without vindictiveness for her sake, made her position more and more impossible.

Weary to death with the strain of the past days, she turned mechanically toward her only hope of shelter and sympathy—little Maisie's home. She tried hard not to think of Benton, but already the newspapers were spreading the news abroad.

SHOOTING CASE DEVELOPMENT

She saw the words at every street corner, and, pass-

ing a man who stood scanning the outspread paper, she noticed another headline.

POLICE STILL BAFFLED

That verified her suspicion that Benton was keeping silence for her sake.

Soon, when he heard what she had done, that she had meanly turned her back upon him, what would he do? Nancy could not help that anxious thought—that she had been unfair, that by the step she had taken she had made herself utterly worthless.

The haunting fear from which she had flown still pursued her. With a fluttering cry that was half relief, half-shamed appeal, she confronted John Grant's sister-in-law.

"I don't know why I came. I just feel done," she broke out pitifully.

Maisie's mother was very tender; seeing the change that had come over the girl, the weary lines about the eyes, the transparent thinness of the pale cheeks, her heart went out to her.

"What a shame!" she cried in indignation. "But never mind, dear, you'll just stay and rest here till you're strong again. That dreadful worry is over—forget about it and cheer up! See, here's Nancy come back to us!" she went on more brightly to the children.

After the cold prison cell, it was like paradise to the girl. While the young widow bustled to and fro preparing supper, with the kettle singing on the stove, Nancy held Maisie in her arms and talked and

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laughed with the children. A glow came into the wan cheeks, a thrilling sense of gratitude to her sorely tried heart.

She was reminded of John, who had often come here in the old days, whom she had indeed seen here only a little time ago, when Maisie was ill.

Later she spoke earnestly to Mary.

"I must go away soon," she said. "I feel that Benton doesn't know that I ran away. When he gets a little better he will look for me, want me. And I cannot bear the thought."

"Don't you worry about him, Nancy," was the widow's spirited response. "I'm sure he got all he deserved. Any girl would have done the same as you. Why, your life would be one long misery; you would never survive, dear. Just you make up your mind not to fret—and grow strong again before you think of going off anywhere."

Nancy's eyes shone with a great gratitude, but she shook her head sadly.

"I feel I cannot show my face outside again after—after what happened," she said. "I shall go away soon, to some place where people will not know me, where I can forget. I shall be terribly lonely. I shall miss you and the kiddies, too. But I dare not stay here any longer!"

Nancy quickly regained some of her lost strength; her blue eyes became clear and softly wistful, the creamy color spread once more in the tender oval face. Although her plans were still unformed, she had decided that she could not well remain with

Mary. Vaguely her mind was made up to go to New York, the Mecca of most lonely souls, where she might sink or swim without having recourse any longer to her faithful friends, and where, at last, she would be out of John Grant's life forever.

She was counting up all the money she had in the world, trying not to brood too much on the perilous days to come, when a knock at the front door heralded the appearance of Mrs. Benton.

"I'm glad I have found you," said the woman when she faced Nancy alone. "The truth is, I am worried to death over this unfortunate business. Lionel is much stronger, and—well, the fact is I have not told him yet that the wedding is off."

Nancy looked up nervously, afraid that she would ask her to reconsider her decision.

"Please, it must be off—I could never again——"

"Yes, yes, I understand, your letter to me made things quite clear," pursued Mrs. Benton. "It seems all so incomprehensible, and I don't suppose I shall ever get to the bottom of your reasons for accepting my son in the first place. I agree, however, that the marriage would be a bad blunder."

"Oh, surely he will realize that now!" Nancy cried.

"But I am in a difficult position," went on Mrs. Benton. "He is asking for you; he is getting anxious because you do not come to see him. Even if I tell him how you feel about it, I'm afraid he will seek you out himself when he is well. There is only one way to end this—this scandal. You must go away. I have come to beg you to do that."

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"I shall be going away—almost at once," Nancy assured her.

Mrs. Benton looked relieved and pleased. After a thoughtful pause, she fingered a well-laden purse.

"I am glad you see the wisdom of it, but I am dreadfully sorry for all the trouble you are having," she said. "You will allow me to help you—to give you any money you may need——"

Nancy only shook her head, though a little money would have been a godsend to her at such a time.

"Thank you, but I'll manage—somehow," said Nancy.

Mrs. Benton did not wait much longer. Her curiosity had deepened a good deal, however, and, looking at the girl with a sudden shade of sympathy, she wondered which of her conjectures was the right one. That Nancy had been in love with John Grant she could not doubt; and here, she felt, lay the tragedy.

"I shall tell him the truth—when you are away," she said as she went off.

Nancy felt that she could delay no longer. Even if only to escape from the fears and misgivings of the present, she made up her mind to be ready on the following day.

"I shall go to New York," she told Mary. What she would do once she arrived there she did not know. Her clothes were still good, fortunately, and, by stinting and scraping, she might eke out several weeks in some cheap lodgings. Everything depended on getting a job quickly, and, with herlong

experience behind her, Nancy hoped that one might be soon secured.

Making her preparations, feeling that she was leaving her old haunts forever, she could not help stopping at times to let her thoughts fly back to the bitter-sweet past. And, more and more insistently, now that it did not seem to matter, she wondered if John would ever be able to forget.

She herself meant to forget utterly, helped by new friends and new surroundings. At present, however, standing on the great dividing line, Nancy's heart went out to the man. Was he still thinking of her?

Then, that same night, news reached the little home of the son and heir that had been born to John and Lucy. Also, there had been a paragraph in the evening paper saying that the Grants had returned from the country.

Nancy paled at first; she sat still for a long time with a great wonder shining in her eyes. Then a smile broke over her face.

"They will be very happy," she said at length, in an awed tone. "How proud his wife must be—and John, too. Oh, how lucky—to have John and a baby also!"

Somehow, the news made a great difference. Nancy could think of Grant now with less pain; he seemed suddenly to have gone right out of her life—even out of the past. She had no longer a right to a place in his thoughts.

He would be happy now and done with old regrets, Nancy told herself as she lay awake long into the night. Thinking of Lucy and the baby that was

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both hers and John's, she tried to shut out feelings of envy that amounted almost to real anguish. Fantastic dreams followed her waking thoughts. She saw herself in Lucy's place, but it was not the wealth and splendor of which she dreamed, only John with his arms about her, a new proud, tender light in his eyes, and, between them, the new little life, all pink softness, that turned love into paradise.

Waking at last, with John still very near to her, Nancy looked out on the new day with a rising sob at the sudden aching sense of loss. How terribly empty her life appeared! In a few hours, she would be far away from all the old familiar things and places, like one cast out, forsaken.

Yet her heart would remain behind, always and always!

Haunted by her memories of the night, with a little time still on her hands, Nancy went out in the morning sunshine. Her face looked pale and wearied; it was so hard to have to say good-by. Having done a little necessary shopping, she found herself on the main road that led to the Fenwick estate.

Unable to shake the wonder of last night's news from her mind, she stood looking toward the big house. John seemed precious near then—and the new baby that had come. Nancy found herself longing suddenly to have a look at the mite; she wondered if it was like John.

Then, as she hesitated, her steps were drawn strangely toward the house. She was going away shortly, and it did not seem to matter now if she

had one last pang. Not that she expected to meet or see anybody she knew, only to feel for a last precious, guilty minute that she was near John, to let her heart say its long last good-by!

She came along the high railing that divided the grounds from the road. With a queer pain tugging at her heart, she arrived presently at a point from which, looking through the trees, a view of the house could be obtained.

It was a splendid place, but Nancy had no eyes for the house itself. On the smooth green of the lawn she caught sight of a little group, and suddenly her heart was standing still.

There, reclining on a wicker chaise longue, was John's wife, with their baby in her arms. A nurse stood close by, and, as Nancy continued to gaze, John himself appeared. He came swiftly up to Lucy, bent over her with great tenderness and kissed her. Then, as he held her hand and bent to look into the pink little face that nestled at her breast, Lucy's eyes rested upon him, her pale face radiant.

And it was no less a precious moment to the forsaken girl who watched from the big outside world. Nancy waited till the welling tears blinded her eyes, then she drifted away, taking with her that haunting picture of what might have been.

CHAPTER XX

A TRICK OF FATE

I HATE having to run away from you, dear," Grant was telling his wife, "but it is some time since I was in New York, and I have so much business there these days." He looked away thoughtfully for a moment, then, recalling a recent decision, he went on, "I have been thinking that we might do worse than get a house there for a time. Our New York office is becoming more and more important with the new business we are doing at the yard."

Lucy clung to his hand. It did not matter where she went, so long as she could always be so sure of John's new tenderness.

"You must see about a suitable house, then, dear," she told him. "I've always wanted to live in New York—to be able to go there when this place gets dull."

"When you are strong again, dear, we'll make our arrangements," he said. "Now I must fly. I have a big conference to attend, then I must go straight to the train."

With a new lightness in his step, he hurried off to the waiting car. Speeding into town in the clear, sunny morning, he felt gratefully that his troubles were at an end, that his path for the future was at

last plainly defined. It was as if the child had been sent to show him his duty and guide him on the way.

He could now think of Nancy Leigh dispassionately, see the mad folly of his recent efforts on the girl's behalf. Nancy was free, and the thing he had dreaded, for which he knew he was to blame, had not come to pass. It was now so much easier to put the girl from his thoughts. The coming of his son made the need for that more and more insistent.

Nancy was going her own way, as he was going his; he hoped deep down in his heart that she would be happy; that, like himself, she was finding it more easy to forget. On the girl's future, he could only close his eyes; he felt that he dare not think what the days and the years might bring to her.

In town Grant was kept busy. When the conference ended, he found he had no time to go on to the yard, and, phoning to have his correspondence brought down to the train, sped on to the station and the New York express.

He went straight to the dining car, and over lunch looked through the few important letters that a messenger had handed to him.

Then, as the train raced through the sun-swept country, his thoughts suddenly returned to the dimness of the past—the past which he had told himself was locked out of his mind forever.

He had taken a letter in his trembling hands—a faded letter in a hand that was only too tenderly familiar. The postmark was over a year old, and,

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turning the envelope over, Grant read the penciled explanation which a clerk had written on the back:

Found between the pages of a reference book in private room, where it had evidently been mislaid and hidden away. Hope not important.

Grant's heart was thumping with foreboding; he felt almost too afraid to open the letter. It was from Nancy; she had written it long ago, when her fate and his were still in the balance. The mystery surrounding its loss did not interest him at the moment—only the dread of what it might contain.

Then, shaking off the numb fear that gripped him, he tore it open. Probably it was of no consequence, he told himself. It was only the rush of memories that disturbed him.

A moment later he was reading as through a mist, the letter shaking in his hands, his heart stirred to its depths. Swiftly he was recalling the day he had gone in a passion of anger to see Nancy's brother about the money he owed him; how, when he had come in at the door, he had seen the girl's face light up and her hands go out to him. Nancy's gladness then had only goaded him to greater fury; now—he knew the truth!

Nancy had not doubted that he had received her letter, the shamed appeal that had made light of all foolish scruples and come straight from her broken heart.

Benton's treachery, his own stupidity and callousness, were made vividly clear to Grant.

John, I want you, I cannot go on like this. I cannot live another day thinking that you are angry with me and that maybe you love me no longer.

In the corner in which he was seated, Grant lowered his quivering face into his hands. The past he had tried so hard to shut out came whirling once more before him, every detail with new clearness, new meaning. What had happened in the interval did not exist.

"Nancy, had I seen this, had I but guessed!" he murmured.

He tried to hide from himself the bitterest side—what Nancy must have suffered, the suspense and shame and grief she must have endured. His heart was torn, his face ashen and drawn, when at last he looked up.

With a pitiful effort, he tried to remind himself of his new allegiance, that his son and Lucy were and must continue to be his only world. At the moment, however, this thought did not matter. He saw that the new joy which had come was but a thin veil through which he would always see a tender, vivid picture of what might have been, what must now forever remain a frail and beautiful dream.

What cruel fate had kept this letter so long hidden away? Grant's brows darkened at the mystery behind it all. A trick of fate—that was what it had been.

Fate had been kind to him, he had fondly thought; how he cursed it now!

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It was not so much his own loss, his mad remorse, that counted. Nancy's loss was so much greater. His heart went out in agonized pity. He felt that she must be made to know the truth, that he was not the blackguard his conduct had made him appear.

Yet, what good would that do? Would it not rather deepen the sense of disaster, of tragedy? Nancy might forgive him, but after, what would her feelings be, and his also?

Grant rose up with the vision of Nancy in her helplessness and bewilderment still haunting and tormenting him. He sought to steady himself, to throw off his torment of soul. Nancy was far away from him, he argued, and it was worse than hopeless to think again of seeing her, of trying to explain.

Leaving the dining car, he made his way mechanically into the next coach to seek the chair that had been reserved for him. This was a day coach, and he was making his way along the swaying corridor, the rush and throb of the train in keeping with his wild mood, when suddenly he started and drew back as if he had seen a ghost.

In one of the seats he saw a girl, alone. As he passed, she raised a white face to him, her great shining eyes wide in consternation. He came to a stop by the seat, and a wave of tense emotion swept over him. Shaking with excitement and a fierce, throbbing joy, he stood staring down at the girl.

Then, impulsively, in a gesture of tender entreaty, his hand went out to her.

"Nancy!" he cried. "Nancy!"

Nancy did not open her lips; she was too fright-

ened to speak. Her widened eyes, however, shone up into Grant's face in warning and entreaty. She sought to remind him that, no matter what he might have to say to her, only greater pain could come of this unfortunate and unexpected meeting.

Grant was not blind to danger, but the letter he had just received made a world of difference. He could think of nothing else just then, and leaving the restaurant car, he had been absorbed only by the desire to let Nancy know—not in an effort to justify what he had done, for he felt he could never accomplish that, but to show her that he was not the monster she must believe him.

Her distress stirred him to the depths. He wanted to comfort her, to cry out his pity and remorse.

And suddenly, as something within his brain seemed to snap, he was down on the seat beside her, catching at her little hands.

"Nancy, I don't care. It seems madness, I know!" he burst out, almost fiercely. "But you must hear the truth, know that my heart is broken——"

She huddled away from him with a frightened cry.

"John!" she pleaded. "Oh, don't go on like that! Think how wrong it is, how useless and wrong!" And then, seeing the torture he was enduring, the terrible distress that was driving him to this folly, she began to forget her own feelings. She did not shrink from him any longer. In place of fear came a great, overwhelming pity.

"Oh, John," she went on, in a passion of earnest appeal, "why bring back what is dead and gone? I

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thought you had forgotten—as I am trying to forget. I thought you were happy, John.”

“Happy!” he repeated bitterly. “I think I have forgotten what real happiness means. I sold that, Nancy, sold all the happiness that might have been mine—and yours, also!”

For a moment her heart stood still, but she tried not to betray the blow that his words had been to her.

“No, no! You are wrong!” she cried, in an effort to end the tension. She saw only disaster ahead, and was prepared to lie to him, to tell him anything, if only to set things right. “If I am unhappy,” she murmured in a strained tone, “it is because I see *you* so unhappy. There’s your wife and—and the baby now——”

Grant hung his head, his lips bloodless and tightly compressed. Then suddenly, he was spreading out her old letter before her.

“Just now that does not seem to matter, Nancy,” he said in a changed tone. “You do not know that I received this for the first time only this morning—a few minutes ago, in fact. All this time it has been lying hidden away; how it was mislaid Heaven only knows! Do you understand me now? Do you see what a difference it would have made to you and me?”

The restraint born of her sudden pity suddenly deserted the girl. His altered tone was grave and low, and he spoke with a depth of pain that smote into her innermost heart.

“Nancy, forgive me! I know how cruel, how mad,

I must have been. But I did not think it was so bad as this. And now it can't be helped; you see that as well as I do. Only—forgive me!"

And presently, with a new light shining into the darkness of her heart, Nancy found courage to answer him. Somehow the blow was not wholly painful. Had it not served to rend asunder the veil that had hidden so much from her?

"John, I understand. I forgive you," she said. "But now please go away. I am so glad I know at last. But please do not see me again. It is wrong."

For a moment he took her hands and pressed them in a fierce clasp as he gazed into the face which must always pursue and haunt him with its tender sadness and desolation. And, suddenly, his eyes were growing blind with the mist that came before them.

"Poor little girl," he murmured, in a broken voice. "I'd give all I have to be able to help you, to be near you. I know I cannot even be your friend, but I can never, never forget. Remember that—that I shall always be thinking of you while I go on the way my duty lies. Nancy—good-by."

In another moment he had risen, and disappeared as abruptly as he had come.

When New York was reached Nancy was the first to alight. The big station was strange to her, but she hurried along with the stream of people toward an exit.

Grant saw her, and, a little later, standing before a taxi near the entrance to his hotel, he caught sight of her again, hesitating fearfully as to which way to

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turn—a pitiful, lost thing, leaving one great fear behind only to meet another.

For one wild moment he was on the point of flying to her side and sending his bitter resolutions to the wind. But just then Nancy spoke to a policeman, and presently she moved swiftly away toward Fifth Avenue.

CHAPTER XXI

AS DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT

HAVING an address in the Sheridan Square neighborhood, Nancy went along until she saw the boarding house. It appealed to her as combining cleanliness and comfort with moderate charges. The landlady left a good deal to be desired in looks and bearing, and with a pang Nancy wondered what would happen, if, a fortnight hence, she found herself with no work to do and her money gone.

The tiny attic room the woman showed her, however, was just the place she wanted, and although the charge almost took her breath away, she knew that, with accommodation so scarce and everything at famine prices, she could not expect to do better.

Left alone, she set about putting her few belongings away, and tried to infuse as much cheeriness as possible into the bare little place.

Only for a minute did she allow her thoughts to drift back to her strange meeting with John Grant, and, even then, she felt that she could dwell on what passed with less pain and regret. If the finding of her old letter had given her a new, keen bitterness, it had also served to create a new faith and understanding in herself, and in John.

And, trying as the ordeal had been, she had been able to comfort and encourage him by listening to

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the outpouring of his heart and sending him away with the knowledge that she forgave him everything, that, henceforth, they would go their separate ways with no misunderstanding to bewilder and torture them.

For the first few days nothing happened. She answered innumerable advertisements. And when at last she went for her first interview, a new fear was born.

It was easy to relate her experience—that she had been engaged for long years at Fenwick's, and latterly with Mrs. Benton. But she had no references to show, and she hated to have to give names, thinking that a correspondence with John Grant or Lionel Benton's mother might ensue.

Her very hesitation did the mischief and, later, Nancy realized that it had lost her a good position.

With the need for frankness made more clear, she continued to try. Almost a week passed. Nothing further had crystallized, and, in spite of herself, she was beginning to brood, feeling the dreaded peril of actual want drawing very near, when hope came again.

Opening a letter that had arrived for her, her eyes widened in bewilderment as she saw that a letter of application she had written had been returned.

Turning hastily to the short note inclosed with it, she saw that it bore an address on upper Broadway, and was written in a bold, masculine hand.

Reinclosed application. You have evidently addressed it to the wrong box number. My

advertisement was for a person with nursing experience to act as housekeeper with small secretarial duties. If you think you would be suitable, I shall be glad to see you any afternoon.

HERBERT MANNING, M. D.

Nancy's heart played tricks. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry she had made this blunder. After pondering the matter, she decided to go to the Broadway address. She liked Doctor Manning's letter, and felt very grateful that he should have thought it worth while to return hers in this kind way.

Nervous with suspense, Nancy made herself look her best before leaving her little room.

The doctor's note turned her thoughts in a new direction. She realized how much happier she might be in such a situation, where she would be in a real home, with the domestic duties for which her woman's heart yearned. It would be infinitely better than eking out an artificial existence amid the grinding routine of a business office, where everything must remind her of the old days at Fenwick's.

Praying that Doctor Manning would, at least, not turn her off with a word, Nancy presently found herself before the number she sought.

"Doctor Manning" was on the big, brass plate at the side of the apartment door. Nancy saw how it shone, and thought the windows, with their trim curtains, looked more cheerful than the others in the same building. Evidently the doctor had his office in the apartment where he lived.

A prim maidservant answered her ring. Ushered

into a pretty and very cozily furnished sitting room, Nancy had little time to wonder at the many things around her. While the maid went off with her message, she stood stiff with apprehension near the door, feeling that, in another minute, she would be on the other side of it again.

Then a most unprofessional sound fell on her ear. She heard some one whistling an atrocious effort at a popular musical comedy hit. Then, suddenly, the whistling ceased, and a moment later a light footstep sounded in the passage.

Nancy caught her breath as the door swung open and the doctor himself stood on the threshold regarding her.

A rosy flush spread in her cheeks as she saw, with a start, how far wrong she had been in her forecast of Doctor Manning's looks. He was quite young—thirty-five or six—and tall and handsome, besides. More, his strong, intellectual face, if a shade severe in cast, brimmed over with the best of humor.

Manning looked taken by surprise as he gazed on the girl—at the sorrow-tinged oval face, with its great, gray eyes, and its wonderful red-gold halo. Quickly, however, he collected himself and came forward.

"Let me see, now," he began, with a friendly smile. "You are the lady whose letter I returned? I hope you didn't lose by the mistake, or the delay?"

"Oh, no. I—I'm sure it didn't matter," Nancy answered, in a confused rush of words. Her cheeks were aflame as she struggled to go on, to tell this man how urgently she needed work.

Manning came quickly to her assistance.

"Suppose you sit down and make yourself comfortable. You are tired and worried, I see! Tell me what sort of place you are fitted for," he said, drawing forward a deep-seated chair for her, and trying suddenly to recollect all she had said in her letter. "You are looking——"

Nancy began to find her tongue.

"I am a typist," she said, as he paused and looked at her. Briefly she recounted her experience at Fenwick's and, later, as social secretary to Mrs. Benton.

Manning listened with patient interest. Then, a shade disturbed, he strode to and fro, always watching her with curiosity and vague pity in his deep, keen eyes.

He smiled a trifle ruefully.

"I wanted some one who will undertake to help me with my correspondence, and also keep my household accounts—look after my place here generally, for I am dependent entirely on my servants. But my advertisement asked for a person with nursing experience, really. Some one who could go out in case of emergency——"

Nancy could hardly contain herself. At the moment, when she felt that Doctor Manning was only getting rid of her politely, she would have given ten years of her life—anything in her power—to obtain such a position.

"During the war I took a first-aid course," she could not resist saying, then flushed into silence again as she saw how terribly eager she was making herself.

Manning's face brightened.

"That's good!" he cried at once, feeling, with a sense of guilt, that at last he had some reasonable excuse for offering the position to this charming and very capable-looking girl. One glance at Nancy had been sufficient to convince him that she was the type he would choose out of a million.

"I wonder—would you care to come and try it out?" he went on. "I don't think I'm a frightfully exacting person, and—well, I should not like it if you didn't feel at home."

Nancy averted her face for an instant; the joy his words gave her was overwhelming.

"I—I'd like nothing better than to try to please you," she managed to say. Then, looking up at him again with eyes misty with gratitude, "About references——" she began, her voice suddenly shaky. Manning dismissed the subject with a gesture and a smile.

"Oh, that would only be a waste of time—and totally unnecessary!" he said at once. "Now, then, are we to consider the matter settled? You will start here as soon as possible. Jean, the parlor maid, will show you round, and I hope you will tell me if everything isn't all right."

Nancy's heart was almost too full to respond. Manning had put out a hand to her as he went toward the door, and she took it for a moment.

"You—you are so kind," she faltered, and presently she wondered if, at last, she had found what had seemed beyond her forever—something like real happiness!

CHAPTER XXII

MEMORIES THAT MOCK

FOR a day or two Grant went about his business in New York like one in a dream. The picture of Nancy as he had seen her, drifting off like a lost thing to meet the hidden hardships and perils of the great city, still persisted in haunting his thoughts.

By an effort of will he kept to the path marked out for him, but, going to and fro in the city streets, his eyes were ever seeking the familiar face and figure, which he felt were lost to him forever.

Solely through his untiring efforts, Fenwick's had secured a New York order which would almost double the size of the business and the yearly net profits. Moreover, on this trip Grant had met men high up in the business world, and had held his own among them; had, in fact, stood out as a leader and a coming power in finance and industry.

On the journey home he thrilled with the sense of his strength and achievement. With a flush in his cheek and the same glint in his steel-gray eyes that had come that morning when he realized that he was to step into James Fenwick's shoes, he saw afresh the envy and chagrin of the false friends who had traded on his good nature and generosity; until, coming up from the back of his mind, the vision of Nancy Leigh in all her loneliness and helplessness was again before him.

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With the passing days the thought of Nancy became an obsession, the uncertainty of her fate a torture.

Then, in the midst of the new rush of business, when his every moment was fully occupied, Grant felt that to go on with things any further he must end the lurking suspense one way or another.

Having finished his work for the day, he left his office and sped off into the network of mean streets in which Maisie and her mother lived.

His heart racing with his new-born purpose, he made his way into the darkened passage and upstairs to the door of the poor little home.

"You, John!" exclaimed his sister-in-law.

Grant strode in, uninvited. The children were in bed, and he could see at least one little head nestling against the pillow, and hear their gentle breathing. For a long moment he stood still, the muscles of his strong face tense and drawn, a queer, soft light shining in his eyes.

"Mary!" he appealed suddenly, stirring himself out of the past into which his thoughts had gone groping. His voice sounded distant and shaky. "Mary, I can bear it no longer. I have been such a fool! I know it now, when it seems too late—that the dearest things are the simplest things. I was mad—mad!"

"John, why have you come—to-night?" His unexpected presence, the poignancy of his appeal, stabbed her heart.

"Nancy—have you heard from her?"

"No, no, never a word. But it isn't that, John!"

"What do you mean? Mary, don't turn your back on me!"

The woman clutched at his arm and looked into his face in distress.

"John, haven't you had word yet?" she asked quickly. "I was over there this afternoon, seeing your people. Your father is very ill, John. It's only a matter of hours, or minutes, till the end comes." Then, in a more impassioned tone, she proceeded: "Oh, if you could see your mother, John, your poor mother whom you left to such terrible poverty! Do you never, never wake up at night with that on your conscience? It was cruel, inhuman!"

John stood for a moment with his lips tightly compressed and a hard look in his eyes.

"Mary, is this true? Is it so bad—my father——" he said at length.

"John, won't you go? Oh, think of your unhappy mother!"

Grant's head was bowed, his hands were clenched fiercely by his sides as he tried to fight back the storm of distress that swept swiftly down upon him from the past. Then, collecting himself, he caught Mary's hands.

"Mary, I am going—going home, at once," he cried. "Heaven forbid that it is the worst! And Mary, you, at least, know how I feel. Say you understand, say you will bear no malice—you will be my friend?"

For a moment she hesitated; then, turning aside with a sob, she went with him to the door.

"Go to your mother, John," she said. "Your place is beside her."

Making his way hurriedly toward his old home, past familiar places, and haunted by a host of distant memories, Grant felt that what had happened—his marriage to Lucy, with the wealth and power it had brought to him—was but a dream, a fantasy.

Like the prodigal of old, he drew near to the humble little dwelling, feeling only the cruelty of his neglect, and bitterly ashamed of the aloofness and scorn with which he had trampled on his parents' love and pride in him.

And his father was very ill—dying!

A dim light burned behind the kitchen blind as he drew near. With sinking heart, he reached the door and knocked—knocked as he used to do in the long ago, so that his mother should know who sought admittance.

For a time he was kept waiting. Then, slowly, the door was pulled open, and, struck dumb and motionless, John Grant gazed on his mother. A great change had come to her. Her hair had turned perfectly white, her worn, gentle faced lined.

As she faced her son for a moment in that queer, awed stillness, a dull light came to her tired eyes. It was as if she looked beyond him, as if she did not know him at all.

"Mother!" broke from him, in a voice strangled by grief and remorse.

"You are too late, John, too late!"

That was all. John huddled away as if her tone had struck him. The door slowly closed in his face.

"Mother, wait! Mother——"

But no answer came.

In the next three days John plunged into his work with a fervor which even he had never displayed before. From early till late he was in his office, conferring with his managers and assistants. His grasp of every detail of the work that was going on was amazing; his ability as a leader and director of men won the admiration of those below him, even while they still resented his curtness and lack of human sympathy.

He was trying to forget, trying to shut out the memory of his cruelty that had helped to bring his father to his death; of his ingratitude that had brought that terrible look into his mother's eyes.

The strain, however, was too much for his strength. Carried farther ahead on the wave of achievement, his thoughts kept reaching backward to the things he had left behind and lost. He sat now in his library, his head in his hands. In his heart one cry kept repeating itself, vainly, pitifully:

"Mother!"

Nothing could shut out the anguish of that brief look on the dear, changed face, framed in white hair, nor the strangely altered voice that had told him he had come too late—that his mother no longer knew him, her son!

But this was madness!

Grant stirred himself suddenly. Setting his strong jaws, he even tried to smile as, once again, he forced his thoughts back to the present and the path he had chosen.

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With a stab of remorse he turned quickly to the wide staircase which led up to the room where Lucy awaited him.

"John, how proud I am of you," she cried, her eyes shining and her arms outstretched to twine about his neck as he came to her side.

He stared at her a moment, the old, tormenting ache returning to his throat. As if for the first time, he saw the change in her. Change seemed to be everywhere this night! Her once stately figure looked thin and frail, her face had become strangely pinched and white, although it was now flushed.

"My poor girl," he whispered tenderly, as he kissed her. "I fear I have been neglecting you, and I will have to do so even more after this. I wonder if I should have gone after this new work. I find that I shall have to be in New York a great deal; often for months at a time. I am needed there more than at the yard."

"No, dear, I must come with you," she told him eagerly. "I could not bear your going away for long periods. We shall go to New York together. I feel strong enough, John."

"I just want to please you, my dear."

"I know, John," she went on, tremulously happy. "You know how much I want you to achieve great things, and I feel it is for me you try so hard. Let me be near you always, to help you on. Then I shall be contented and happy."

"Your happiness is everything, dear," he rejoined

earnestly. "It is for you I must live—you and our little son. Lucy, help me always to remember that!" he added with a note of pain, for between them, suddenly, had come the haunting, torturing vision of—Nancy Leigh.

CHAPTER XXIII

OUT TO DINNER

IN the neatly gowned, capable-looking girl who went to and fro in Doctor Manning's apartment there was little resemblance to the friendless newcomer to the city, who, a short time ago, had passed like a shadow into the streets of New York.

Nancy had become a very busy person, and one of importance besides. Very quickly Manning had learned to depend on her, and the consciousness that he was at least not displeased with her efforts had wrought a wonderful change in the girl. The brightness and comfort of her new environment, no less than the feeling of friendliness that had sprung up between her and her employer, filled out the hollows below the great, gray eyes, and infused a healthy glow into the pale, soft cheeks.

Nancy felt that already she was learning to forget. Somehow her last meeting with John in the train had helped her to a greater peace of mind, and resigned her, at last, to the inevitable. She could go about her numerous duties, the work she swiftly learned to love, with a song in her heart.

What had seemed utterly beyond her had come to pass; she was really and truly happy here. At times her very happiness and joy made her tremble with the feeling that it could not last, that somewhere,

some time, the past must reach out to touch her and awaken her from her dream.

When, engaged at the desk in the outer office one day, with the sunshine streaming in at the window and turning the masses of her red-gold hair to wonderful flame, she looked up suddenly to find the doctor regarding her critically with his head on one side.

Whistling softly, he came leisurely into the room and up to her.

"Miss Leigh, you are overdoing it," he began, very solemnly. "Physically, you are fifty per cent better than you were when you came to preside here, but you are overanxious. You've been worrying a lot lately, and—I am going to prescribe!"

"Oh, I don't feel ill!" Nancy assured him, unable to prevent a smile. "I don't like medicine!"

"Wait," he rejoined. His eyes held a queer, nervous appeal, and he hesitated. Then, "Pardon my saying it, Miss Leigh, but you are missing the fun of life. My prescription is: more pleasure, more diversion. And you're going to get your first dose to-night! I am going to take you out to dinner."

Nancy paled with dismay.

"Oh, no," she began in a tone that begged him not to tempt her. Such an outing with him must only bring back painful memories of the past.

Manning was coolly obstinate, however.

"You're coming. You shan't escape your medicine," he retorted. "I shall expect to see you dressed and ready at seven, sharp!"

That was the end of it. Nancy found herself alone

an instant later, at a loss what to think. At one moment her heart was sinking with consternation; the next, a burning flush was in her cheeks, and a thrill of happiness going through her.

Manning was the essence of kindness; that was all, she told herself in the end. And, taking it in this spirit, feeling, indeed, that she could not do aught but obey, she put on the new gown she had bought, and in a flutter of great excitement at last approved her reflection in her mirror.

Manning was waiting for her, watch in hand.

"You have just managed it!" he announced, with mock solemnity. "And you look splendid! I shall feel very proud to-night, Miss Leigh!"

"Please," was wrung from the girl.

But he had turned to open the door. Together they went down to the waiting limousine. Sinking back presently against the soft cushions, with the electric light showing up the fineness of the interior, the silver fittings, the little silver vase, with its bunch of fresh flowers, Nancy felt that her heart was ready to burst with the wonder of it, and with sudden, aching shame she caught herself playing make-believe!

Ten minutes later she was going into a fashionable restaurant with Manning at her side. With any one else she felt that she would have turned and fled from the ordeal. Beautifully gowned women and black-coated men laughed and chatted at the many sparkling tables, the strains of an orchestra rose softly above the hubbub.

Deftly Manning piloted her to a table in a little

palm-screened alcove, where she saw, with great relief, that they would be alone.

"You don't know how happy you have made me, how grateful I feel!" She smiled.

"Tut, tut!" he said, after a thoughtful pause that Nancy found hard to bear. "A dear, good girl like you should be happy all the time. I believe in happiness, and I feel that we are justified in sacrificing everything else to attain it—and to keep it. Nancy——"

"Oh, please, Doctor Manning!" Nancy was imploring, suddenly. She saw that he was more than kind, that there was that in his eyes which, long ago, she had seen and responded to in John Grant's. Her heart thrilled and throbbed as she realized the happiness this man would offer to her, but at the same time, it was almost breaking with misgiving and fear.

"Nancy, why should I hide it for months and years?" he was saying, reaching out to lay his strong, capable hand on hers. "I see how lonely you are, and I see, also, my own empty life. Your coming that day—yes, I felt it right at the beginning!—made me wake up. Why should we wait, Nancy? If you think you could care for such a crank as myself, if there is nothing in the way, make me wonderfully happy! I love you, Nancy. I want nothing so much as to see you my wife!"

Her head was averted, her hand still held in his. A stormy protest was on her lips, wild words of entreaty, but suddenly she could not speak. The great temptation assailed her to shut out all that had gone

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before, to respect only her own happiness and the love of this good, strong man.

Then, suddenly, looking toward the table on the other side of the palms, she saw—John Grant!

He was dining with a small party, speaking occasionally, when the eyes of his friends were turned upon him, and sometimes smiling. But nothing seemed to be able to really stir him out of his thoughtfulness and depression. He was a man in a reverie, looking back.

“Nancy, tell me—tell me you care!” came Manning’s eager question, and his grip on her trembling hand tightened. “Forget the past! Look into the future—our future, Nancy!”

Nancy could hardly hide the nature of her distress. Until this moment, when the sight of John transformed her whole outlook and sent new emotions racing in her heart, she had felt herself drawn to Herbert Manning. An answer had been struggling to her lips, the short words that must bind them together in a new intimacy and open out new, wonderful worlds.

It was not that she was allured by the position and the luxuries she would attain as the doctor’s wife. Nancy was above material things. But Manning was a gentleman in the best sense of the word. He had been more than kind to her, and now he was offering the thing she had thought lost to her forever—the love and devotion of a strong man.

Always respecting him, she had been consciously lately of a deepening sense of regard that made her want only to please him. His friendship was a rare

possession, and he could never know how grateful she was for this comradeship, and how anxious she was to retain it.

"Nancy, why won't you look at me—answer me?" she heard him say. "Please don't be angry with me, whatever you do. Have I made a mistake?"

Nancy's heart was throbbing. Wildly she sought a clear conception of her feelings. So much hung in the balance. John Grant, she reminded herself, was no longer a deciding factor in her life and future. Terribly unhappy suddenly, she knew that she dare not delay any longer.

For a fleeting instant she looked toward Grant again. He was sitting in the same position, his head sunk on his hands, and in his eyes a brooding, far-away look. He did not see her, did not suspect how near she was to him.

But suddenly her heart spoke clearly. She knew that, if she could never again be anything to the man whom a cruel fate had torn from her, neither could she ever be anything more than a friend to the man who wished to fill John's place.

She turned to Manning then, her tender gray eyes misty with sorrow.

"I could never, never feel angry with you, Doctor Manning," she said. "You have been such a friend to me—my only real friend. I would do anything in the world to show how grateful I am, but, oh, don't ask me to be any more than I am!"

He was silent for a little time, his face slightly turned away, as if he would hide the twinge of pain

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that her refusal brought to him. But the next moment he was ready with a smile.

"There, don't worry! You don't know how much I want to make you happy; I feel you deserve it, little girl! But I believe I have been putting my foot in it. There is something I don't know. I wonder—can you tell me?"

Nancy looked at John again as if she sought his help in this fresh difficulty. She did not doubt Manning's motive in asking. He was not curious. He wanted, rather, to be able to understand and help her. With a pang, she thought also that he was seeking a glimmer of hope.

Impulsively she turned to him again.

"You have a right to know," she broke out in distress; and in a few words she told him her secret, told him simply that she had loved only one man, that a tragic misunderstanding had driven them apart forever, and that it was not in her heart to regard another in the same light.

She did not mention names, nor did she think it necessary to say that that one man was here, a few feet away from them. Her heart had been in her words, however. Her pitiful secret was out.

And Manning understood at last.

"Forgive me, Miss Leigh," he begged, laying his cool, strong hand on hers once more. For a moment he did not go on, wondering in his heart if some day this old sorrow might wear away, and feeling how eagerly he would watch for the dawn of such a hope. Then, stirring himself, he made an effort to banish the cloud that hovered about them.

"Come forget my foolishness; don't let me think that I have spoiled your evening or your faith in my prescription to take you out of yourself!" he said cheerfully. "I have reason to be thankful, you know. You are always near, and you have made such a difference since you came!"

Nancy sent him a grateful smile as, for an instant, their fingers touched. Then, swiftly, other thoughts came, and her heart began to sink anew.

Somehow the precious confidences that had passed between them had made a great change. They were better friends than before, she knew, but after tonight could they go on as they had been doing, living under the same roof, and continue to preserve a relationship which was virtually that of master and employee?

At the moment Nancy could not bear the thought of leaving all the little joy in life that had come to her; she was heartsick and miserable.

When, presently, they rose to go, her mind was still in a quandary of doubt.

Grant and his friends were still at the adjoining table, and for the next few moments Nancy was absorbed in an effort to avoid recognition.

And then, on their way down the room, Manning excused himself for an instant and turned aside to the table at which John Grant sat!

Going on toward the door, Nancy glanced round in alarm. With a gasp of relief, however, she saw that it was one of Grant's friends to whom the doctor spoke. Grant had raised his head and was regarding the intruder with absent interest. The

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meeting was so casual that no introductions were made. Manning spoke only a word or two. Then, with a smile he called a "Good night" to his friend, and hurried after Nancy.

"Manning, a rising young doctor. He's one of the best already," some one said as he passed on, and had he turned he might have seen a sudden queer interest in John Grant's face, and heard him ask a question of Manning's friend.

Thankful for her escape Nancy was soon in the car by the doctor's side. For a long minute neither spoke. Manning looked as if he were at a loss for appropriate words. Nancy felt instinctively that he was wondering what was in her own mind.

"Miss Leigh, you have not forgiven me. You will make up your mind to forget what has happened!" he said reproachfully.

"Oh, I cannot!" was wrung from her. "I—I feel so sorry, so upset. And, somehow, it seems a shame for me to think of staying on with you. It will never be the same!"

His rejoinder came quickly, in a tone of strange severity.

"Will you make me feel such a brute?" he said. "Surely you know me better than that? Why can't we become better friends, rather? My dear Miss Leigh, at least we understand each other. Don't be ridiculous! In any case, even if I have to lock you up, you are not leaving my house, so there's an end to it!"

And he had his way.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SUMMONS

IN his New York home, John Grant stood with set, lined face, his eyes fixed on the doctor who had just come from Lucy's room.

"You mean—there is real danger?" he said, with twitching lips.

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Grant," said the medical man gravely. He had been in attendance on Lucy for some time, and Grant had learned to trust him. "It is a pity Mrs. Grant decided to leave the country," he went on in regretful tones. "I felt that the change would do her no good. But she was so insistent."

"She must go back at once!" Grant said.

"In her present state that would be out of the question," the doctor objected. Looking into Grant's eyes, he went on, in a low tone. "Your wife is critically ill. I must arrange a consultation immediately. We shall do our best, but—her condition is very grave."

Grant bowed his head for a moment, his lips tightly compressed in an effort to hide the fear that another blow was about to fall upon him.

When he was likely to lose her, Lucy represented a great deal to him. Her love for him had never wavered; she was the mother of his boy. She had

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given him wealth, power, position, made him the man of great achievement he was to-day.

"Something must be done!" he groaned aloud. Then, facing the doctor, he went on, "Spare nothing. Call in the best man, the greatest specialist you know." For a moment he hesitated, as if trying to recall a name. Then he remembered. "There's a Doctor Manning who is very fine, isn't there? I heard of him the other night at dinner."

"Ah, yes, he's the fellow," the doctor agreed. "I don't think we could do better than leave the case in Manning's hands. He's young, but he has a wonderful reputation."

"Phone him now!" said Grant.

With a glance at his watch the old doctor nodded and followed Grant into the hall. The harassed husband himself called the number, and a minute later he was asking for Manning.

"Yes. What name, if you please?" came a girl's voice, a voice that made John hesitate for an instant, his face going a shade more deathly.

Then he pushed the receiver into the doctor's hands.

"Doctor Grierson," was the name flashed to the other end of the wire, and presently Manning himself was speaking.

"I will come over in a few minutes," he said, when he had learned the urgency of the case.

At Lucy's side John waited. She had been up, seated by the French windows, when he saw her last. Now she was lying in bed, their little son clasped in her arms. Grant hid the stab that came to his heart

as he looked down upon her. Her face was terribly thin, and masklike in its pallor, but she met his gaze with a smile, catching the hand he put out to her and nestling her head against his arm.

"John, will you—miss me?" she whispered.

Grant found a response difficult. His heart was torn with a hundred regrets. He recalled the cruel words he had used to her not so long ago, the mad impulses that had taken him away from her, and made him almost hate and despise his wife!

"It can't come to that, my darling!" he was crying suddenly, with an earnestness that spoke his remorse. "Lucy, my poor girl, don't you see I could not bear it. For the sake of our baby you must get better. You must!"

For an instant her face was averted, and John did not see the bitter-sweet smile that flickered on her lips. She was thoughtful for a time, until he spoke to her again.

"Ah, John, you don't know how much I want to live, just to be near you!" she told him then. She clung to his arm. "You have been everything to me, dear, but I know—I know I have been selfish!"

"Lucy——"

His protest died away suddenly as the consulting medical men were announced. For a few seconds he stood talking to Doctor Manning. Then, softly, he withdrew from the room.

To John, waiting downstairs in a fever of suspense, it seemed an eternity until the two doctors appeared on their way to the library to discuss the results of their examination.

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Manning hesitated a moment, and, as Grant came from one of the rooms, he asked for the phone.

"A nurse will be necessary at once," he said briefly. "I have a person of experience in mind, but I'm afraid she will not be available at once. I shall phone for a girl in my own house, whom I can thoroughly recommend, for the present."

A few moments later he was talking to Nancy.

"I want you to come out here at once, Miss Leigh," he said, giving the number and the name of the street. "I have some instructions for you, so I shall wait till you arrive."

It was like a curt order from master to servant, but Nancy liked it, and flew off to lose no time in obeying the summons. Manning had been as good as his word. They had become better friends since the incident in the restaurant, but it was little speeches such as this that made her feel that she had been justified in remaining.

And so, half an hour later, a relentless fate brought Nancy Leigh and John Grant together again.

When the taxi drew up outside his door, Grant came into the hall. Knowing that this must be the nurse whom Manning had called in, he sent the servant away, and he threw open the door.

Dusk had fallen, and Nancy was across the threshold before the truth dawned upon either of them. Then, petrified with amazement, she stood in an attitude that suggested immediate flight.

Grant, too, looked stunned and dismayed.

"Nancy, you here!" broke from him huskily.

Then, as she saw his pallor, and the strained sus-

pense written in the lines of his face, she tried to steady herself. She recalled why she had come, and a great pity surged up in her heart.

"Doctor Manning sent for me," she explained breathlessly. "I did not know that it was your home—that it might be your wife."

Just then, when anything might have happened, Doctor Manning's voice came to them. Looking round, they saw him standing by the library door, with the older man, his colleague.

They did not guess that, watching them for a moment, a sudden suspicion of the truth was dawning in the young doctor's mind. He came forward with a faint smile that brought a strange encouragement to the girl. "Come, Miss Leigh, there are one or two points I wish to make clear to you. I want you to take charge of this case temporarily, for one night, perhaps two. That is all."

Nancy hung back, although her hesitation made her feel ashamed. Manning was striding across the floor of the hall again, expecting her to follow.

Then, looking toward John, her scruples suddenly vanished. Grant met her eyes, and he seemed to say to her, "I entreat you to stay!"

But the greater ordeal was yet to come.

Coming soon afterward into Lucy's room, Nancy found the position almost intolerable. It was impossible to regard the case from a purely professional viewpoint, feeling only that this woman was seriously ill—so gravely ill, she had heard from Doctor Manning, that her life was in peril—and that her presence here was urgent and inevitable.

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With Lucy's eyes upon her, Nancy stood still for a moment, blinded by the wave of pity and distress that swept over her. Then, impulsively, she went to the young mother's side, and fell on her knees before her.

"Oh, I feel for you!" she cried, from the depths of her heart. "Please let me help you! Please let me stay!"

A change came over John's wife. Her eyes had widened in amazement and fear at Nancy's advent. But now, looking into the girl's pitying, tearful face, her fear and distrust disappeared, and her dark eyes shone with a new, strange softness.

"Nancy Leigh!" she murmured, putting out a hand to the girl. "Ah, yes, you may stay. I have been thinking a lot about you, and, perhaps because of that, your steps have been guided to me at this time. It is good of you, Nancy, to think of me in this sympathetic way!"

In that awed hush that followed, as they read each other's eyes, their hands clasped together, the miraculous seemed to happen. The Lucy Fenwick of the old days pleaded for forgiveness, and, with all the sincerity of which her great soul was capable, Nancy gave it.

A moment later Nancy set about the duties before her, and nothing more was said about the past or the new bond that linked them together.

Only when Lucy slept did Nancy lay aside her professional rôle. With unceasing wonder she would gaze at Lucy's son, the little morsel of humanity that, one day, would grow up to be a man like John

Grant. Sometimes she held the child in her arms, holding it to her heart with great tenderness.

And no one saw, no one knew of those precious moments, when tears dimmed her eyes and the queer, aching emptiness of her heart was secretly filled.

On the following afternoon came the expected announcement from Doctor Manning.

"The nurse will be here to-night," he said curtly. "You will arrange to leave then, Miss Leigh, and you want to get a good night's sleep when you get back!"

Lucy did not understand at the time, but when Nancy mentioned the other nurse, she pleaded with her to remain. Nancy could only shake her head.

"I am not fully trained, you know, and Doctor Manning would never forgive me," she said. Silent for a moment, she saw how impossible it would be to call to see Lucy. She had avoided John so far, but, if she came here of her own accord, what would he think? "No, I should love to stay, but I must go," she added.

For a little time Lucy lay watching the girl moving softly to and fro. A troubled light lurked in her eyes, and more than once she opened her trembling lips, as if to call Nancy to her. Not until sounds of the new arrival came up from the hall below did her effort succeed.

"Nancy!" she called.

The girl hurried to her side, and the question on her lips went unspoken as she saw Lucy's eyes, and caught a glimpse of the conflict that was going on in the woman's heart.

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"Nancy, you are going away, and I shall never see you again," went on Lucy, her voice growing steady as, with Nancy's cool white hand over hers, her task became suddenly easier. "Before you say good-by, I want you to say that you forgive me, Nancy."

"Oh, there is nothing to forgive—nothing!" Nancy cried.

"Ah, yes, there is; you know there is, Nancy," went on the stricken mother. "You know that I stole John from you. I was wicked, cruel. But oh, how I loved him, wanted him! I felt that you could not need him so much as I did. I did not consider all that you would feel—what it really meant to you. I loved him, and I fought for him. That is my only poor excuse, Nancy. But I see now how utterly bad I was. I don't think you could ever say it—that you forgive——"

"Oh, but I do; I do!" was wrung from the girl she had wronged. And, lifting a tear-stained face, Nancy showed how far her forgiveness went. "Please do not think of that any more. It is forgotten—forever."

And, just then, it was Lucy's look of gratitude, her sudden great happiness, that seemed to hurt most. She turned her head on the pillow and smiled. Other words trembled on her lips.

"Nancy," she said at length, "some day you will be very happy again. I shall be far away then. But—there is my baby." For an instant a look of pain flitted across the mother's face. Her hands sought Nancy's again tightly. "Perhaps, dear, you will see

him grow up—grow to be like John. You will love him, Nancy, take care of him, for my sake? Promise me—just that!”

Nancy's head had sunk against the bed. She felt that she could never have the courage to look up again. Her face was aflame, her heart throbbing with feelings of which she was afraid.

“Promise me, Nancy——” A step came to the hall and on toward the door.

“I promise,” said Nancy; but she did not know what the promise implied.

CHAPTER XXV

TRACKED DOWN

EARLIER that day, Lionel Benton, now out and about again, entered the subway at Times Square and boarded a northbound train.

His thoughts were far away until, following on the heels of other passengers, he dropped into a corner seat next to the door. Then a change came over him.

A flush of excitement came to his face. His eyes sharpened and kept a furtive lookout on the platform of the car.

After several stations were left behind, he rose quietly and passed onto the platform, closing the sliding doors behind him. Then sharply he came face to face with the man in the guard's uniform.

"So—you did not go West?" he said.

The guard started as if he had seen a ghost. Benton knew that he was not mistaken; that in this busy, good-looking fellow he was facing Arthur Leigh, Nancy's brother.

Arthur saw the futility of attempting to disown his identity. Benton's abrupt and unexpected appearance had taken him sadly off his guard.

"No, I did not go," he answered at length, with a trace of fear. "I suppose you'd better know. I met another man who was keen on going West, and he

went off that night in my place, and using my name. I've been going steady since, and"—with a note of appeal—"for Heaven's sake forget what I did, and let me carry on! Give me my chance!"

Benton laughed outright, the flush still deep in his cheeks. In more ways than one this meeting with Arthur was a stroke of amazing good fortune.

"I like the way you talk about getting your chance!" he retorted. "Didn't I give you enough chances? And a nice way you chose to show your gratitude!" Recalling all he had suffered at this man's hands, Benton's tone suddenly altered. "Are you aware that the police are looking high and low for you?" he went on viciously. "You don't imagine you are to get off scot-free for attempting to murder me?"

"I was mad that night," Leigh appealed. "I was thinking of Nancy. For Heaven's sake forgive me, and don't give me away!"

"I think not!" was the rejoinder. "I'll take good care you go through the mill now I've spotted you, unless"—he paused then, his eyes narrowing and fixing intently on the other's face—"unless you can tell me where to find Nancy," he ended quickly.

Nancy's brother looked away nervously.

"I can't tell you; I don't know," he said.

"She's somewhere in New York; I'll bet you've found that out!" insisted Benton.

"I can't help you," was the stubborn reply.

"Then that settles it! I'll stand by and give you in charge at the next station. You ought to get seven years for using that revolver on me."

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Leigh was trying to keep himself in control, but, knowing that Benton would be as good as his word, that he would not miss this chance of repaying not only him, but Nancy, he broke into a wild appeal.

"You wouldn't send me to prison just when I'm beginning to get on my feet?" he cried. "I didn't mean it that night; I was clean off my head! Don't be vindictive! Don't bring this on me, and on my poor sister!"

Benton caught at his arm to enforce his purpose.

"I'll give you in charge, unless you can put me on the track of Nancy!" was his ultimatum. "You know where she is. I want a word with her—that's all."

They were almost at the next station, and Arthur still fought to make up his mind. Then, simply because it seemed the lesser evil, he was blurting out what he knew.

"Honestly, I don't know what she's doing, but—she's in John Grant's house on the West Side just now. I found out where he was living, and, last night, looking for a clew to Nancy, I saw her go into his house. That's all I do know."

"In John Grant's house!" Benton looked suddenly savage.

"Yes, but his wife's there, too."

The other man still stared incredulously. Then, as the train drew alongside the platform he stirred himself, and, thinking it unnecessary to get Grant's address from Arthur, and staggered by the news, he turned away and left the train.

That Arthur had told the truth he did not doubt.

But Nancy in Grant's house, with Lucy also there! It sounded too wildly improbable. His purpose—the only one that absorbed him these days—seemed suddenly more difficult, but he could not bring himself to give it up. He lived only to see the girl again, to appeal to her to go on with their bargain, and, if she failed him, to make her pay!

Benton had no difficulty in obtaining Grant's address. Later, he went out to the beautiful home in the neighborhood of Riverside Drive.

Nancy was on her way from the house, on her return to the doctor's apartment. Her face looked very pale, and her eyes, after one glance upward to Lucy's window, were watchful in case John Grant might arrive before she was out of the way.

Then, observing the figure that was coming toward her, she stopped with a stifled cry of dismay.

Benton came up to her, a burning flush in his face. He put out a hand to the girl but let it drop when she drew away from him with a look of terror.

"Nancy, I have come for you!" he said then, sharply.

"Please don't say that!" she entreated him. "That is all over and done with. I can no longer be anything to you, and, oh, you might have the sense to know it."

"You don't know me," he retorted. "I've been looking for you everywhere. After what happened, I want you more and more. You are going to marry me as soon as the arrangements are made!"

"I will never marry you—never!" she cried wildly.

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"Oh, can't you see how mad it would be? I saw it in time. I cannot say how sorry I am for—for what happened that night. But don't talk about it. It can make no difference. Let me go my own way, please."

Suddenly he was catching at her wrist, his impassioned face close to hers.

"No, I won't!" he flung out furiously. "You're not going off so easily as that. Do you take me for a fool? Do you think I'm likely to forget all I owe you? No, I think not! I mean to marry you, and, by Heaven, I will!"

"Be careful!" warned Nancy suddenly, in new alarm.

A handsome, closed-in car had swept into the street, and, as it stopped, Nancy tried to hurry on her way; but, as Benton still hung by her side, she hesitated one moment.

From the window of the car the face of John Grant was looking out at them.

In a moment Grant had leaped from the car and was striding toward them.

John paused only an instant. Then, ignoring Benton, he addressed the girl in a tone that was both pleading and commanding.

"You will go back in my car, Nancy," he said. "Come!"

In a few seconds more she sunk against the cushions in John's handsome car. Grant had said nothing further to her beyond telling her address to his chauffeur and murmuring a short good-by as he turned toward the house.

Little did she guess that the taxi that thrummed some way behind was bringing Benton in relentless pursuit.

In the days that followed, Nancy's thoughts were chiefly for John's wife. Her forgiveness had been profound and sincere, and, recalling the open-hearted way in which Lucy had admitted the wrong she had done, Nancy was full of pity.

From Doctor Manning she heard day by day that Lucy's condition left no hope of recovery. Manning looked at her shrewdly when she made inquiries. Latterly he would answer her very briefly:

"Everything humanly possible has been done, but——" And he would shake his head with a grave look.

Then, little more than a week after Nancy's visit to Grant's house Manning was silent for a time when she confronted him. He looked into her eyes, as he always did, keenly, searchingly, as if he would see what composed her inmost thoughts.

At last he spoke.

"Mrs. Grant passed away late last night," he said.

After lingering a moment he went on into his study.

In her room Nancy stood by the window staring out into the fading light with misty, unseeing eyes. Her woman's heart cried out at the hardness of a fate that made it impossible for her to go to the darkened home and offer sympathy.

"Oh, and I promised so faithfully!" she cried at last.

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Then, rudely, her thoughts and regrets were scattered. Looking from the window at a taxi that had drawn up she saw a hated, familiar figure leap out.

Lionel Benton!

Nancy stifled a cry of terror. For a time she stood petrified with amazement and foreboding. What could Benton want here? That he had come to see her seemed beyond a doubt, and in a whirl of conflicting thoughts she wondered what she would say to him.

When the minutes dragged out, however, Nancy woke up to the realization that Benton had not called to see her. No one came to announce his presence or to bring a message to her. And there was no doubt that he had entered the house. The taxi had driven away, and she had heard the ring of the apartment bell.

In a frenzy of suspense, Nancy came out into the hall. She could see the door of Manning's study; it was closed. It was only when Manning was consulting with a visitor that he permitted it to be closed.

Nancy had no thought then for the common deencies of her position. Urged by a wild impulse—the impulse of self-protection—she hurried down the hall and, incapable of realizing what a sorry figure she must cut if any of the servants appeared, she stood straining her ears at the study door to catch what was being said.

At the moment Manning was speaking in a voice she had never heard him use before.

"Look here," he said, "if I hadn't been introduced

t you the other night by a most respected friend I should feel inclined—well, to kick you out of my door!”

“I quite understand your feelings, doctor,” came Benton’s hurried response, “but it is up to you at least to let me prove my words. You must help me out—apart from the fact that you may find it undesirable to have such a person in your house. See,” and to the listening girl outside came the sound of the nervous rustling of papers, “here is the whole story as it appeared in the *Press*. I can give you my word on the facts. We were to be married in the morning, and that night she tried to murder me!”

Nancy’s hands went over her eyes in an effort to shut out the hideous thing Benton wanted her one real friend to believe.

“But she was discharged, and I see you were the means of liberating her,” came Manning’s voice, for the first time betraying some excitement. “You stated definitely that it was not—not Nancy Leigh——”

“Ah, yes, that was my first thought when I recovered and understood the position. I wanted to save her!” pursued Benton. “I did not say who the culprit was. I couldn’t. There was no other person involved. I saved her, but the truth remains, in spite of my life. It was she who fired the shot—the girl who, a few hours later, was to have been my wife! I ask you now, what would you do if you were in my shoes?”

CHAPTER XXVI

FLIGHT

NANCY did not wait to hear more. For a moment she stood looking wildly about the hall, as if the shock of her discovery had robbed her of all sense of her present surroundings. Then, like a hunted thing, she wrested herself away and sped to her own room.

She did not stay long there. With brain on fire, she could think only of her shame before Herbert Manning. It did not matter that Benton was telling a tissue of lies. The only fact, at the moment, was that she could not deny her association with the man and with the crime.

She paced to and fro in a fever of dread. In a few minutes more she had packed some odds and ends in a traveling bag, and then, hardly sensible of what she was doing, she was going downstairs again softly, furtively, and presently out into the street.

And, while Nancy drifted along the streets of New York, as she had done on her first coming, not knowing where her steps were bent or what lay in front of her, the two men went on with their conversation.

Benton failed to see, in his ardor, that Manning was drawing him on. For a time it seemed that he encouraged him, that he was almost friendly.

"I cannot but be convinced that Miss Leigh has been mixed up in this affair," he said at length, and he rose out of his chair and stood regarding Lionel Benton from under lowered, inscrutable brows. "I can hardly say that I feel dismayed, however," he went on. "Naturally I am surprised—on the face of your story. But what is your object in putting it before me?"

Benton looked up for an instant sharply.

"Why, I think it's only right that you should know," he answered. "I'll bet she said nothing about all this to you. More, I wish to see the girl. I feel I cannot allow the matter to rest. I have explained things to you, hoping you will understand, and help me to come to an understanding with her."

"You forget that Miss Leigh's private affairs are no concern of mine," said Manning.

"I agree. But you are her employer, and you ought to know about her, don't you think?"

"I'm afraid, to accomplish that, I should want a little more information than you are inclined to give me, Mr. Benton."

"Well, ask her," was the somewhat discomfited retort, as Benton, disliking the doctor's piercing gaze, rose and stood away from him. "You'll find she won't deny it. My main purpose, however, is to see her. You will, at least, help me to do that?"

"As far as I am concerned, there is nothing in your way," said Manning, curtly. "Since you have dragged me into your affairs, however, I can soon discover if Miss Leigh is willing to see you."

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He slipped into the hall and closed the study door behind him.

After going into the offices that Nancy usually frequented he turned to her room.

"Are you there, Miss Leigh?" he called.

Receiving no answer, he waited thoughtfully for a moment. Then, with a sudden show of impatience he sought and found the maid.

"Miss Leigh was indoors an hour ago. Where has she gone?" he demanded.

"But she isn't out, sir," insisted the girl amazedly.

"Go to her room and see. At once, please."

A few seconds later Manning's suspicion was verified. The maid, who was a particular friend of Nancy's, was able to say that Nancy was not only out, but that she had taken some of her belongings away with her.

"What a pity!" said Manning then, annoyed suddenly at the curiosity on the girl's face. "I wanted particularly to see Miss Leigh before she went. Probably she will be away for several days. She has gone rather unexpectedly, you know."

"Didn't say a word to me, sir," voiced the maid.

The doctor had turned quickly away, however, and in a few strides was once more face to face with Benton.

"She must have seen you. She's gone!" he announced.

With a gasp of astonishment, Benton made for the door, hopeful that he would be in time to catch up with Nancy and profit by her helplessness. Manning, however, was suddenly barring his way.

"No use. She's probably reached the other side of the town by now! Tell me, now," he went on, "have you any idea where she would be likely to go? Has she any relatives or friends in New York?"

Benton was almost too vexed to answer.

"Only her brother," he said absently. "He's a guard in the subway. Don't suppose she'll go near him, though."

"You mean that Miss Leigh has a brother employed in the subway?" Manning followed up quickly.

"Er—yes," Benton answered. He flushed suddenly, and, no longer interested in the doctor, was on the point of excusing himself when suddenly Manning's hand shot out to take his arm into an iron grip.

"Not so fast, my man! About Miss Leigh's brother—he comes into the story, does he not? It was from him you learned that the girl was staying here?"

"Well, it was," admitted Benton, compelled to answer, with those stern, piercing eyes upon him.

"I should like to get at the real truth," went on Manning bitingly. "I reckon, somehow, that you wouldn't shine in face of it, you miserable hound! Whatever your relations with Miss Leigh have been in the past, she has nothing but fear for you now. I'm not surprised, looking at you! You are trading on that fear, playing the bully and the cad! And the worst of it is that you have succeeded in driving her out of the only home she has! She has escaped, though. And just let me tell you this: if ever you

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dare interfere with the girl again, if I find you attempting to put yourself in her way, as you tried to do to-day, I'll make you sorry! Now go!"

Nancy did not rest till she had put a mile or two of busy streets between her and Manning's apartment.

Exhaustion pulled her up. The night was drawing on, and she had nowhere to go. There was always the boarding house near Sheridan Square, to which she had gone on her first arrival. Probably she would drift there presently.

With a shiver of dread, the girl recalled the fear and anxiety she had endured before Doctor Manning's letter had come to raise her hopes and courage. It was all to be lived through again, and, this time, the search for work must be so much more hopeless. It was the old story—no references.

Her head in a mad whirl, she bent her steps mechanically toward the downtown neighborhood. Presently she stopped with the dread conviction that it would be hopeless to attempt to go there without money. Her landlady had insisted on payment in advance, and what story could she tell to gain even a night's credit?

Walking on again aimlessly, terribly afraid of the weakness that was creeping over her, she drifted from street to street until, her quaking limbs incapable of carrying her another step, she stopped again, with a hand pressed tightly against her cheek.

Then, suddenly a veil seemed to be drawn over everything, shutting out her terror, and infolding her in a blissful forgetfulness. She was conscious of

some one running forward, of voices in her ears, and then all was darkness.

Unconscious of the scene of which she was the center of interest, Nancy might presently have been taken to some hospital had not a dramatic intervention come.

Among the inquisitive men and women who poked their heads over the inner ring to see what had happened was a serious-faced man in the garb of a subway employee. He was about to pass on his way hurriedly when, getting a chance glimpse of the girl's deathly face, a startling change came over him.

"Good heavens! Nancy!" broke from him in amazement, as he elbowed the crowd aside.

Wildly Arthur Leigh caught at his sister, cried out to her, taking no notice of the sensation he was creating. To the kindly stranger who held her he declared their relationship.

"Then better get a taxi or something, and get her out o' this," said the man. "Reckon she'll come round in a minute."

The suggestion galvanized Arthur into new life. A taxi was passing at the moment, and, having overheard what had passed, more than one person in the crowd held it up. With a whirl the car drew up to the curb.

Tenderly Arthur took his sister in charge. Laying her on the cushions, he gave the address of his lodgings east of Fifth Avenue.

In a few minutes the taxi stopped. Nancy had opened her eyes by then, but she had not recognized

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her companion, and she looked terribly weak and frightened.

"Nance, it's all right. Don't worry. I'm glad I've found you. And, Nance, I want you to know that I've kind of wakened up—that I'm different now!" Arthur cried to her.

The familiar voice gradually came to her, and its altered tone, its queer tenderness, gave her another start.

Then presently, through widening eyes, she gazed up into the two faces above her—that of a strange woman—landlady of the house—and Arthur, her brother! With a gasp of amazement, she spoke his name. The woman went away suddenly, and, as if it was part of the nightmare through which she seemed to be living, Nancy heard her footsteps creaking up the stairs to a room above.

Then, for a long, throbbing moment, their hands clasped, brother and sister regarded each other; Arthur with strange, earnest entreaty, Nancy still dazed and bewildered, but her eyes no longer hard with fear.

"Arthur, what happened? Where am I? And you——" she broke out anxiously.

"You're all right now, old girl!" he told her, with an effort at brightness. "It's lucky I was near at the time. You were over on Fourteenth Street. I don't know what happened, but I came up just in time. These are my rooms, Nance. The landlady understands. Don't say you've got to go back anywhere to-night. I've found you, and I want to keep you, and look after you for a time. Nance," he

went on in a rush, as she only stared in an effort to recall her last conscious impressions. "You must be surprised to see me in New York. I didn't start for San Francisco that—that mad night. I stayed here. I sort of woke up after that, and you'll never know how sorry I felt, how I thought of you, and all the misery I'd helped to bring. I steadied up, Nance, and now you needn't be afraid of me. I'm going straight—for your sake, old girl."

Just then his words did not matter. Nancy hardly understood his recital, but his note of regret, of supplication, brought her a strange, glad sense of relief. The tension became eased, and her immediate fears sped away.

"What happened, Nance? What made you get sick?" he was asking her a little later, when she was able to sit up and take in her new surroundings.

The events of the evening came crowding back upon her then, and with a strangled cry of grief, as her thoughts flew to Herbert Manning, she buried her face in her hands, seeking only to shut out the shame of it all.

Arthur Leigh was silent for a moment. Then, with a glimmer of understanding, his brows darkened and his fists clenched.

"He found you then—Benton?" he muttered. Nancy did not answer, but he knew that there was no doubt. "Don't worry, sis," he went on fiercely. "He doesn't know where I hang out, and I don't suppose he'll get to know. But, by Heaven, if he tries to interfere another time——"

Nancy was clinging suddenly to his arm.

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"Arthur!" she entreated. "Don't think mad things again. You forget! It's dreadfully hard, I know, but whatever happens, you must do nothing. I can take care of myself."

The boy averted his head then, and she could not know what his thoughts were; but her own were clear enough. Fate had been kind to her to-night. She was grateful for the miracle that had rescued her from the New York streets and shown her a brother in whom she might now have some pride. But, driven from pillar to post, she felt that this was only a respite, a halting place, and that presently she must be driven on again.

It was her fate. When would the next blow fall, and whence would it come?

CHAPTER XXVII

MANNING PAYS A CALL

IN the luxurious dining room of his New York home John Grant sat at the table, alone. His butler stood discreetly in the rear. Occasionally a footman came across the soft pile carpet, put down a dish noiselessly, and disappeared again.

Nobody spoke a word. Grant scarcely ate. He spoke to the butler presently, and the sound of his own voice startled him. His thoughts were far away.

Going later into his book-lined study, he felt his utter loneliness afresh. It pressed down upon him like a leaden weight, and brought a great, aching emptiness to his heart. The splendor of the rooms, the air of opulence and plenty everywhere around him, served only to intensify his pain. He could obtain all that money could buy; yet there was always the one thing that lay beyond him; the real, true comradeship for which his heart cried out in vain, the love and fellowship of those who were dear to him.

Lucy's death had been the crowning blow. Lately he had found content and happiness in the knowledge of her love for him, and in her desire to be always near.

And then, just when he was beginning to prize her love and comradeship, helped always by the new bond that now held them together, she had been wrested cruelly from him.

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Huddled in his big chair before the work that awaited him, he was suddenly aroused from his brooding reverie. Following a ring at the front door, a footman came to announce a visitor.

"Doctor Manning, sir."

"Show him in!" he cried eagerly, and went to the door to greet the doctor as he laid aside his hat and coat and came up to shake hands.

"H'm! All alone?" said Manning, as he peeped into the room. He looked at John Grant with furtive keenness, as if he would penetrate what had been last in his thoughts.

Seated presently, with Grant by his side, he puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, and tried to work round to the real object that had brought him. That John Grant knew nothing of Nancy's flight was evident. Just how he would take the news was an open question.

An interruption came presently with the advent of a nurse, who carried Grant's little son in her arms.

Manning smoked reflectively as Grant sprang to his feet and leaned over the mite for a few seconds, his eyes queerly misty. For an awed moment he took the child into his arms and kissed it. Then, opening the door for the nurse, he watched her go upstairs, before returning to his chair with a stifled sigh.

"Fine, healthy child, that!" remarked Manning. "A sturdy little chap to be proud of, Grant."

Grant made no response for a moment, but sat with his hands clasped before him and the old, far-

away look in his eyes. Then with an apology he looked up.

"I'm glad you think so, doctor," he said. "The child is all I have left."

"Tut, man, you mustn't be too downhearted!" rejoined Manning. "Capable nurse, by the way?" he added, a moment later.

"I think so," was the answer. "Only there's no one, now, to take the same interest. I—I pity the poor little chap!"

"That can't be helped, my dear fellow," said the doctor. "But—h'm!—there are many women, I dare say, who would love to care for such a child. There's Miss Leigh, for instance——"

Grant looked up sharply, his face crimson. Then, as quickly, he sought to hide the start Nancy's name had given him at such a time, and in such a connection.

"Only," went on Manning, "Miss Leigh is no longer in my house." His eyes never left Grant's face as he spoke, and he was quick to verify the suspicion he had already formed that between this man and Nancy Leigh was a romance, tinged with tragedy, that lived always in their hearts.

Once again Grant glanced up sharply.

"What do you mean, doctor? Nancy—Miss Leigh was here, of course. I met her on her arrival the night you phoned for her. You can't mean that you sent her away?"

"Hardly," said Manning, with a smile. "A finer girl never breathed!" And with his eyes fixed on Grant's face, he told him briefly of the visit of

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Lionel Benton, and the discovery that Nancy had fled.

Grant sprang to his feet; his face had gone tense and pale. He opened his lips to speak, but, collecting himself with an effort, stilled his tongue and turned away from Manning's searching scrutiny.

"You believe that Miss Leigh was guilty?" he said, when he had steadied himself.

"On the contrary," was the swift response. "I believe, with all my heart, that the poor girl is not more culpable in the matter than I am, or you, Grant!"

Grant averted his face at that moment. Little did the doctor think how profoundly his last words had gone home! For a long moment John wrestled with his conscience and the impulse to speak out. But the doctor would not understand, he told himself. He knew Nance Leigh only as an employee. He could not suspect how much the girl had suffered, owing to his colossal folly!

When his caller rose to go, Grant suddenly stirred himself.

"I must—I should like to find Miss Leigh," he blurted out, with strange earnestness. "Doctor, can you do this for me? Find her—bring her back. Say you will!"

"Trust me to do my best, Grant," was Manning's assurance. He waited a moment longer, on the chance that Grant would speak. Nothing further was volunteered, however, and presently he turned into the hall. Whatever happened, his mind was made up more strongly than ever to leave no stone

untuned to discover Nancy's whereabouts. Grant could give him no clew. His interest in the girl was sincere and vital, however, and that was all Manning wanted to know.

"Drop around for a chat some night soon," he said, as he left Grant and went off with a hopeful smile.

That his deductions were right Manning was not long in learning, and from the lips of Grant himself. As he had expected, Grant did not forget his invitation, and, a few evenings later, he was announced in the doctor's apartment.

Little did the doctor know, however, the insufferable anxiety and dark loneliness that had goaded Grant to this new step!

John did not give himself time to think better of his resolution. Alone with Manning, he blurted out his whole story.

"Forgive me for hiding it from you the other night, doctor," he wound up. "I believe you are Nancy's friend, and I can trust you implicitly. I wanted to forget Nancy. She has begged me over and over again to shut out the past. But I can't. And now she's adrift somewhere, and that scoundrel, Benton, will be striving to locate her. We must find her, at once!"

Manning was pacing to and fro. The story disturbed him at first, but, thinking it over in the light of recent events, he seemed to see a bright side to it.

"Certainly, we must make every effort," he said. "And I choose to be optimistic, my dear Grant." Then, facing the other man, he proceeded somewhat

sternly, "I would not count on seeing much of the girl, though. I cannot promise to refer her to you."

Grant looked into the doctor's face for a moment, searchingly. Then, with a twinge of pain, he turned aside.

"I know. Don't misunderstand me, doctor," he appealed. "When I think of Nancy, I think of my mother—and of the friends I had forgotten. Only through Nancy can the door to the past be opened. Nancy, if she will, can accomplish what I have failed to do—win back the dear things in life I so foolishly threw away."

Manning put out his hand impulsively.

"Then I am with you, Grant—up to the hilt," he said. "We shall find her."

CHAPTER XXVIII

NANCY AND ARTHUR

NANCY was meanwhile very grateful for the freak of fate that had once more brought her and her brother together.

Arthur, however, had changed wonderfully. Her heart thrilled with a new pride and love as she saw how serious was his effort to wipe out the disasters of the past.

He insisted on her remaining with him till she had made up her mind what to do. And, weary and helpless with the strain of recent events, she felt glad of the respite. The house in which she found herself was clean and comfortable, and the landlady kindly disposed toward her.

Nancy looked forward eagerly to Arthur's return at noon and at night. Through the day the time began to drag, and she found it hard to keep her mind from brooding on all she had been compelled to leave behind.

At first she went about in continued dread of Benton. He pursued her relentlessly, and it was unlikely, she thought, that she had yet seen the last of him. His ingenuity would soon enable him to track her to her new home.

As the days sped past, however, she became more hopeful. Benton might be resting on his oars, but

she seemed to have shaken him off for good. She prayed fervently that he would not attempt to wreak his vengeance on her brother.

Over and over again her thoughts reverted to Herbert Manning. What did he think of her? Had he believed Benton's malicious story? Knowing the doctor's common sense, Nancy had a feeling that he would at least keep an open mind on the subject. Her greatest regret, at times, was that she had fled so precipitately out of his way. That was the thing that must damn her in his eyes.

"Oh, why didn't I stay and tell him everything!" she thought now, when it was too late.

Manning's friendship had been her most treasured possession. Had he not even offered to make her his wife? What must his thoughts be on that point now?

She had been so comfortable and happy in his home! The past had been swiftly fading away, with all its vain, tormenting regrets. She had looked forward steadfastly into the future that had seemed so secure and untroubled. And now this cruel blow!

Lucy's death might have warned her, she thought. Before that she had been able to think of John almost dispassionately. The consciousness of his nearness had comforted her strangely, and he had seemed happy with his wife and child.

But Grant was alone now, and, like her, he must be brooding. Her heart went out to him.

But it was the child that now made the strongest appeal. There was her promise to Lucy; the promise

that had been wrung from her in that last tragic good-by.

Only to know that John was overcoming the blow, to be sure that the motherless child was well! Nancy felt that she might then take courage and turn her thoughts to other and more urgent concerns.

When dusk had set in one night, and she had gone out on some small errand, the impulse to go farther could no longer be denied. Climbing onto a passing bus, she was borne uptown to the neighborhood of Riverside Drive, where John Grant had his New York home.

It was cloudy and dark when she slipped furtively around the corner. A few houses away, she could see the lighted lower windows of the one she sought.

Her heart was throbbing with fear, and more than once she was on the point of turning and flying back the way she had come; but surely, irresistibly, like steel to a magnet, she was impelled to go on.

Presently she stood before the house, looking up at the lighted windows.

Creeping up the short flight of steps, Nancy looked into the big, handsome library. Suddenly her heart was contracting with keen emotion.

John was in the room, alone. He was sitting with his head sunk on his breast and his eyes fixed on the fire in brooding reverie. Then, while Nancy still gazed through dimming eyes, the door opened, and a woman entered with a bundle in her arms. Grant rose then, a smile lighting his face. He bent over the child that was all that was left to him. He kissed it tenderly. Then——

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Nancy heard a step beside her, and with a smothered, startled cry looked round sharply. Then she felt her heart stand still.

A strong hand went out to steady her in a gesture of reassurance.

"Miss Leigh!" said the well-remembered voice of Herbert Manning. "At last I have found you!"

Nancy's face was swept with burning color. The doctor's evident pleasure at seeing her made her forget, for a moment, the circumstances that had driven her away from his house. But now that the first shock of seeing him so unexpectedly was over, she was covered with shame and dismay. Her lips parted, but speech was beyond her.

Manning understood, and came quickly to her aid.

"Whatever you do, don't worry about that fellow Benton," he insisted, laying an encouraging hand on her arm. "I am perfectly frank, Miss Leigh. I have heard the truth. I have nothing against you. Rather do I feel more and more that I want to be your friend."

"You—you know?" Nancy managed to gasp. They had come away from Grant's door and, after walking a few paces, slowed down to face each other again.

Manning responded with a brief nod.

"Of course, you guessed what Benton had come about that day?" he went on. "You saw him appear, and concluded that he was—well, out to get you, shall we say?" with a whimsical smile that gave her added confidence.

"I—I heard," she confessed, drooping her head for a moment.

"The cad!" said Manning suddenly, crisply.

Nancy looked up again, her eyes big with inquiry.

"Who told you—the other side?" she ventured at last.

Manning was characteristically direct. He nodded his head toward the house where he had just found her.

"John Grant, of course!"

Nancy's head was averted again. She caught her hands together, and seemed at a loss whether to find pain or joy in the announcement he had just made. John Grant had told him! Then he must know the other secrets she had kept locked away in her heart.

"And—you believe in me?" she said in a low voice.

The smile was back on his lips, and his eyes met hers steadfastly, with a kindly, piercing look that emphasized the sincerity of his response.

"Miss Leigh, you were a very foolish girl that day!" he said. "If I was angry and annoyed at all, I'm afraid it was at the way you went off. I got rid of that scoundrel, Benton, in no measured terms! But I felt I wanted you to hear—to help me give him the lie. And now," he went on in a tone that dismissed the matter finally, "I'll trouble you, for a moment, to dwell on my interest in the proceedings. A nice state you got my affairs into by your base desertion! You never gave that a thought, eh? You never realized how beastly awkward and comfortless

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you were making things for me. A pretty hole I've been in ever since!"

Nancy stared at him for a moment. Then a faint smile touched her lips at his raillery. Shame still lingered, and the suspicion that it was only his kindness of heart that prompted his present attitude. But the conviction that their friendship was unbroken and unblemished brought a thrill of gratitude and joy.

"You are much too good to me. I feel ashamed!" she told him, with quivering lips.

"Besides, knowing all you have suffered, my dear, I feel a brute!" he told her, as he pressed her hands in sudden pity. "You mustn't talk like that. I am not used to it. I shall feel ridiculous in a minute! Besides, I'm afraid I am more concerned about my own creature comfort and well-being. I'm a bit of a brute, you see!"

Nancy looked up at him again. She knew what he meant—that he was about to propose her return to his home. At the moment, however, she felt she could not make any promise. It seemed wrong, somehow, after her recent conduct. She could not believe yet that he could mean it seriously.

Then, with a start, she recalled the circumstances of their meeting.

"But I am keeping you," she said hurriedly, with a glance at Grant's home. "You were——"

"On my way to see Mr. Grant, yes," he said, helping her out. "Grant is a lonely man these days, you know." His eyes were once more keenly upon her, gravely thoughtful. "I shall be perfectly frank with

you, Miss Leigh. I had discovered your address—that you were living with your brother. I was hesitating only as to what action to take. I meant to have you back by hook or by crook!” Then, after a short pause, “And you?”

Nancy paled, then the crimson flush was sweeping back into her cheeks. For a long moment she remained tongue-tied and utterly disconcerted.

“You did not intend—well, to call on Grant?” went on the doctor.

“No, no!” she burst out. “You cannot understand. John Grant is nothing to me—nothing! I was thinking of the baby. I wanted to find out if he was well——”

“Ah, of course!” cut in Manning, with a nod that concealed all that he did understand. “The kiddie is getting on famously, I can assure you. I dare say he’ll miss his mother more later on.”

He felt like saying something more, but checked himself in time. Nancy was greatly disturbed, he saw, and she was preparing to leave him. He put a hand out to detain her.

“Oh, no, you’re not going to rush off and leave me in the lurch again!” he went on with a smile. “When am I to expect you back at my office? I refuse to wait indefinitely.”

“You are too kind,” broke miserably from Nancy. “I feel I should not go back, after coming away as I did.”

“Fiddlesticks!” he retorted. “The servants understand that you were called away suddenly, and they must be expecting you back at any hour. And since

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you can't make up your own mind, let me do it for you, my lady! You are under my orders again, remember. I wish to see you most particularly tomorrow—say in the afternoon, after lunch. I have something important to say to you. Better bring any belongings you may need, for I have a case on which I may wish to send you!"

Nancy hesitated a moment, overjoyed; yet her thoughts were rushing elsewhere. Then, suddenly, she burst out with what was in her mind.

"I will come back—more gladly than you know. I will do anything you want me to do. Only you must promise faithfully not to let John Grant know," she said.

Manning looked put out for an instant. Then, noting her earnestness, he conceded the point.

"It's a bargain!" he cried, with a smile.

So, next afternoon, Nancy was once more installed in her old room. That Manning had thought well of her, even after learning of her flight, she was soon to discover from the servants. No one suspected that her absence was due to anything other than the usual "emergency" case that occasionally cropped up.

Recalling the doctor's words yesterday, she did not prepare to put up for the night. He had mentioned a case on which he proposed to send her. Intensely interested, and anxious to show her gratitude, Nancy waited until he had gone into his study. Then she went and tapped on the door.

"Come in!"

When she entered, the doctor sat on for a time

thinking. Then he rose and put a kindly hand on her shoulder.

"Now you are going to do something to please me, Miss Leigh," he began. "The case concerns—John Grant."

Nancy started and paled.

"No, he knows nothing of your presence here," went on Manning with a shake of the head. "The action I propose, too, will not necessitate his hearing your name. In the first place—I hope it is not an impertinent question, Miss Leigh?—you have no animosity toward Grant?"

"Oh, no, none at all. I—I am sorry for him."

"Well, you will not refuse to help him, then," continued the doctor. "Grant is sorely troubled. I think, at the moment he must be the loneliest man in New York! He has confided in me as a friend, but I feel that you already understand his trouble, and you alone, Miss Leigh, have the power to lift it. Grant is estranged from his mother and from his dearest friends. The reasons are, I dare say, well known to you. This, then, is the mission I am putting into your hands—to effect a reconciliation!"

"Me?" said the girl with a gasp.

"Grant himself has failed," pursued Manning, answering her unspoken inquiry. "He admitted as much to me. More—I am going to hide nothing from you—he confessed that one person alone could help him to 'open the door to the past.' That person was yourself, Miss Leigh. Surely you will not refuse? Whatever Grant's sins may have been, he has

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paid the price in full. You can understand and you can help him, if it is in your heart to do so!"

Nancy had turned aside, her head averted. She was silent for a few moments. Then, suddenly, with a deep flush in her face, and a new radiance in her gray eyes, she turned to Manning again.

"It is in my heart," she answered. "I will go at once."

CHAPTER XXIX

MAISIE'S LETTER

GOING up in the train, Nancy looked forward with mixed emotions to seeing old friends and places. Recalling the tragic events that had driven her away from the neighborhood of Fenwick's, the shame and fear of those days stretched out to lay an icy finger on her heart. Great changes had come, and the time seemed very distant; but people would not have forgotten her.

Yet her mission was a precious and urgent one. Nancy tried to think less of the man for whom she had come to plead than his friends—his saddened old mother, his sister-in-law and her children.

And she thought not only of Grant now, but of the motherless child who seemed so much a part of him, too.

Nancy felt a pang at her own neglect as she made her way at last from the station down into the network of mean streets where Maisie and her mother lived. She prayed that, since last she had heard, nothing had happened that might bring a crushing disappointment.

With a thrill of relief she discovered that her friends still lived in the same house.

"I have never forgotten you, but it was shameful that I didn't write," she told Mary.

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John's sister-in-law and her children hailed her visit as a joyful surprise. They had thought she was lost to them forever, the mother told her. And, looking round the humble little home, and at the shabby, clean dresses of the children, Nancy's heart contracted. If ever there was a home deserving a little brightness and help, surely it was this one.

Nancy's remorse and anxiety soon lifted. Had she not come with good news? John Grant could accomplish wonders, and was it not in his heart now to play the good angel, to do anything within his power to win back the respect and love he had lost?

Later, when the youngsters were put to bed, and Maisie, with Nancy's present of a doll hugged to her breast, had fallen blissfully asleep, the erstwhile typist at Fenwick's confessed to the mother the real purpose of her visit.

"He's eating his heart out. I have seen with my own eyes how he is suffering," Nancy went on pleadingly, a flush spreading into her cheeks as she recalled the circumstances attending her last sight of John through the lighted window of his home. "There's the baby, too, left all alone. Oh, surely you cannot refuse to forgive and forget the past?"

Mary regarded the girl with steadfast eyes that grew soft and shining.

"No, dear," she answered at length, "I would never think of refusing. I have pitied John, often. But it's not for me to say. I have little to forgive. There's John's mother, and, Nancy—there's you!"

Nancy smiled wistfully.

"He knows that I bear him no ill-will," she con-

fessed. "We understand each other at last. But we must be as strangers. He does not know I have come here. If I thought he knew, I should go away. Afterward, I—I dare not think of him. I can only try hard to forget; I must forget even that I have come here now for his sake."

Her heart was very full as she said this, and quickly the young mother came to put an arm about her.

"You have been brave, dear, and wonderfully good," she murmured. "John's mother's heart may be very hurt, but, if you can forgive, so can she. We must try, Nancy."

Thinking of the visit she must pay next day to John's old home, Nancy scarcely slept that night. She recalled John's mother as she had been in the long ago, and it was hard to believe that she would continue to close her heart to the appeal of her only son.

There were things, however, that Nancy herself could remember only with a shudder: the neglect and scorn the mother had endured, her lonely poverty, the father's bitter end, with their son living, close by, a life of opulence and luxury.

The girl could not close her eyes to the enormity of John's conduct. But she understood things now that John's mother did not understand, and some way—any way—the heart of the mother must be softened!

In the morning, with Maisie in her arms, dressed ready to go out, an inspiration came.

"Deary, I've something I want you to do!" she cried. "I want you to write a real letter—to Uncle John. You must tell him to come back from New

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York to see you and your mummy—and granny, too!”

Maisie was a little appalled at first. She tried to suggest there were many technical difficulties in the way. But with a light-hearted laugh Nancy scoffed at these.

“Come!” she went on, as she turned to find pen and paper. “You must begin the letter now. Uncle John is just dying to come, I feel, but he must be invited first!”

“Will he bring his big motor wif him?” Maisie wanted to know, among other things. Her eyes were filled with the wonder of bringing Uncle John back by an effort all her own. Then, clapping her hands, she sat down at the table, pen in hand, with rare enthusiasm.

“My dear Uncle——” began Nancy, an excited flush in her cheeks, and with her help over some of the sentences, and with much guiding of the tiny fist over the paper, the letter was at last done.

MY DEAR UNCLE JOHN: I have been missing you dreadful. Mummy says you are far away, but you have a fine motor and can come quickly, can you not? Do come, Uncle John. I want you again, and so does mummy, and granny, too. And please bring the new baby. I do so want to see it, and mummy and granny wants to see it, too. Your loving MAISIE.

“There, now!” exclaimed Nancy, when she had finished reading it aloud. “If that doesn’t bring Uncle John back, nothing will! I tell you what we’ll

do now. We'll take it right around to granny and let her see what a clever little girl she's got."

Maisie's pride would admit of no thought of a rebuff from her granny, so, with great confidence, she set off at Nancy's side for her uncle's old home.

Nancy's heart came into her mouth as she saw how frail John's mother had become.

Mrs. Grant was busy in her kitchen as the pair entered. Nancy caught the dull despair in her eyes and in all her movements. The fire was out; the little, barely furnished room looked cold and cheerless.

"Nancy Leigh!" Mrs. Grant cried.

She came forward wonderingly to take the girl's hands, and her face brightened for a moment at the warmth and tenderness of Nancy's greeting.

"I thought I'd lost sight of you for good, Nance," she went on. "It's nice of you to come—with Maisie, too." She looked away for a moment, her eyes beginning to fill. "I have been reminded of so much this day. I've had to give up. You've just come in time, Nancy Leigh!"

"Why, mother, you don't mean——" Nancy broke out, pityingly, using the name she had used in the old days.

Mrs. Grant shook her head, and reluctantly the truth was wrung from her.

"I've prayed I might see the end here—in the old place," she whispered, so that Maisie might not hear, "but it's not to be. The poorhouse is waiting for me."

"Mother!" broke from Nancy.

Then Maisie had her word.

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"My letter to Uncle John!" she burst out impatiently. "Show it to granny, Nancy!"

Nancy could not help a burning flush. In an instant Mrs. Grant's eyes were upon her. For a long moment nothing was said; then, tremblingly, Nancy held out the fateful appeal. She let the old woman read it, Maisie, meanwhile, looking on, hankering after her granny's admiration and approval.

The older woman said nothing. She handed back the letter with trembling hand, her head averted.

Nancy saw what was on her lips, that the appeal only saddened and upset her. Then, with her arm about the lonely mother, she went on to speak from a heart that was overflowing with a love and devotion that nothing could kill.

"You would not refuse, mother! It's never too late. John was embittered. He misjudged me, but I did not know till lately how I had misjudged him!" Her voice shook as she went on. "Think, mother! You may be wrong; you *are* wrong. Think of the lonely child—your grandchild. John's heart is aching for you. He will come, and you must show him that you want him, mother. Oh, say you will!"

"Is it true that—that he will come?" asked John's mother, after a pause. Her face began to brighten, her breath to come more quickly as she saw the girl's profound sincerity, and realized that her boy had truly repented—that his heart was crying out for forgiveness and love.

Then, suddenly, the cloud of doubt and depression was dispelled. Maisie was watching anxiously, and remembering her letter only, she had rushed to the one conclusion.

"Granny, isn't it a nice letter?" she said dolefully.

Mrs. Grant took her up into her arms, and the tears were suddenly dimming her eyes as she hugged the child to her.

"Ah, it's the nicest letter that ever was, my darling," she answered. "Granny could never write one like it!"

CHAPTER XXX

HIS GOOD FAIRY

GOING over his correspondence next morning, John Grant came presently to the envelope addressed in Maisie's labored handwriting. With a sudden thrill, he opened it and read the brief letter it inclosed.

"'I want you again—and granny does, too.'"

Grant's heart seemed to stand still with the sudden doubt that assailed him. Could it be true that his mother wanted him at last; that the child's message was inspired? Leaping from his desk, he strode to and fro with racing pulse, wondering whose was the voice behind this simple appeal.

A mountain of work awaited him that morning, but he did not give it a thought. His mother wanted him. He believed that this must be true. He was to be given a chance to redeem himself, to win back the love and respect he had trampled underfoot!

The joy of it was not without pain; the pain of suspense, the thought that, after all, fate might be only playing him another trick. The world this morning, however, seemed a vital, throbbing place, with none of the stillness and the great, aching loneliness of yesterday.

Excitedly he made his preparations for the journey. There was no train till the afternoon, and as

he had done on another memorable occasion, he decided to make the trip by motor.

As the miles were swiftly eaten up, his confidence grew. Soon he would see his mother, and this time she would not turn from him!

More than once he found himself wondering what motive had prompted little Maisie's letter. The mystery of it only served to drive his thoughts more anxiously to his mother. Was she ill? Had his sister-in-law been moved, through worry, to send the summons?

No, he felt sure it couldn't be that. There was a simple impulsiveness about the child's letter that told him the hearts of his dear ones had spoken—that they knew of his awakening, and how much he wanted to be with them again.

Coming at last into the outskirts of the old familiar town, Grant ordered the car first to proceed to the Fenwick estate.

He waited here only long enough to give orders to the staff of servants who were rudely stirred out of their placidity by his arrival. Then, on foot, he set out for the old home.

His mother was at the window, just as she had been in the old days, looking out for his return from the yard.

For a moment John Grant hesitated. She did not smile, but her dear face betrayed a strange emotion that stirred the returned prodigal to his depths.

Then, eagerly, he went to the door. It was unlatched, and he pushed it wide open. With dimming eyes he looked on the familiar little passage, and,

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dazed with his great new joy, he strode into the kitchen.

"Mother!"

She stood before him at last, looking pitifully worn, but with that strange new radiance in her face and eyes. Her lips trembled.

"My son——" he heard, and next moment his strong arms were about her, and her head was nestling on his breast.

For a long time he held her thus, his heart too full to speak, and hers also. It was a hallowed time, when the past that was remembered was only that distant part of it that knew no bitterness, no riches or power—only the love and comradeship of the old humble home life.

John was the first to break the spell.

"Mother, I was bad. Can you ever forget?" he said.

"You're my boy. I've found you again. That's everything, John!"

"You're going to give me a chance to make amends, mother!" said the man presently, when their tongues had been loosened. "I'm taking you back with me to my home—to New York also, if you wish it, for I'll need you there as well."

His mother would not hear of it, however. Later on, when she became more accustomed to the change, she promised to go. Meanwhile she pleaded that she would feel only miserable and awkward, and John understood.

"Then I'll stay here with you!" he decided. "We'll make this the cheeriest place on earth!"

"But the neighbors—the whole town, John?" she protested. "What will folks say?"

"Let them say what they like," said Grant. "This is my home, and I want to feel proud of it, and of you, mother!" He seized on the idea suddenly of keeping the old place, and of putting up here occasionally. It would be like old times. But sooner or later, he meant to have his way, and install his mother in the splendid home that had been the Fenwicks'. He rose at length from the table, where his mother had spread all that her cupboard held. Her pitiful efforts to hide the extent of her poverty made the man's heart contract.

But soon his face was beaming again. He held a fairy's wand, and in one stroke he meant to change all this!

"Let's see, now," he went on. "There's Mary and the kiddies. We must celebrate this great occasion, mother. I'm going out for a little——"

But just then a knock sounded on the door, and a moment later his sister-in-law entered, with Maisie by her side.

"Look, mummy, he's come!" cried the child, and rushed precipitately into her uncle's outstretched arms.

Thinking of Nancy, the younger woman's face paled for a moment at seeing John. But the wonderful gladness that lit up his face and that of his mother found a swift response in her own. With her hand clasped in his, she met his eyes, and understood that all was well at last.

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"But, Uncle John, you didn't bring your motor!" protested Maisie, a little later.

"No," said Grant, with a smile. "You'll see that to-morrow, dear. I'm staying with granny to-night. To-morrow I'm going to take you all home with me for the finest party that ever was! Do you hear that, mother? And you, Mary?"

"No, John, I'd rather not," was the response.

Grant was obstinate, however.

"You're coming!" he insisted. "And to-night you and I, Mary, are going off to do some shopping, and Maisie will come with us. Don't say any more about it. I've a lot to make up, and I'm going to begin right now!"

Going along the street presently, with Maisie's hand in his, Grant began to come slowly to earth again. He caught the nervous apprehension in his sister-in-law's face, and knew there was something she was trying to hide. Instantly he remembered the letter the child had sent him. Searching in his mind for a clew to the mystery of its origin, his thoughts came up against—Nancy Leigh.

A cloud settled over his face. A sigh escaped him. The sweetness of the past was coming back to him, but later he would find the incompleteness of it—the aching blank that only Nancy Leigh could fill.

Then, half guiltily, he looked down at the child who trotted along by his side.

"Maisie, that was a splendid letter you sent me," he said. "Did you think it would bring me back so soon?"

Maisie nodded with great conviction.

"Yes, because—because Nancy said it would," she was responding when her mother caught John's arm in no little distress.

"It's true, John," broke from her. "Why should we hide it? It was Nancy who came from New York to intercede for you. It was Nancy who told Maisie to write that letter to you, and begged us to let it go. You have only Nancy Leigh to thank!"

Grant walked on for a time in silence, his head bowed, his lips very firm. Then he spoke again.

"And where is she now?"

"She's gone back—to New York," was the reply. "But please don't think of her, John. She didn't want you to know, and she'd never forgive us for letting you into the secret."

"Is she happy?" was Grant's only other question.

"I—I think so," came the answer, which only disturbed the man more and more.

CHAPTER XXXI

MANNING'S RUSE

AS time wore on, Nancy felt that the future was secure, and that her own tribulations and those of the people she loved were over.

Nothing more was heard of Lionel Benton beyond the rumor, passed on to her briefly by Arthur, that he had gone off on a hunting expedition to Central Africa. Arthur himself was working hard to redeem himself, and coming constantly to see her at the doctor's office. Beyond occasional outings with her brother, Nancy's interest was solely in her work.

Herbert Manning remained her one great friend, and the girl felt that she could never repay the kindness and consideration with which he treated her.

After her visit to her old home, having accomplished her purpose there, she had worried a good deal as to the result. Then, one day soon after, a letter came from Maisie's mother which ended the last anxiety.

You should see the great changes that have come, dear. John saw that his mother would never be happy up in such a grand place as the Fenwicks' old home, so he has taken the loveliest place imaginable for us, out in the country. John is so stubborn. We dare not say "no" to

him, these days! I am writing by the prettiest lattice window. It's just as if it were out of a picture, with the sun shining everywhere. Mrs. Grant is out on the lawn; she feels, as I do, that it's all a dream. And you should see how happy the kiddies are! Maisie is to start school soon. But, oh, Nancy, I wish you would change your mind and let me tell John about you! Although we never mention your name—I just feel I daren't!—we are, all of us, thinking of you. It's you we have to thank; it's you who deserve more than anybody else; and, instead, how lonely you must be! It's a shame, and it makes me sad to think of you all by yourself. You must, at least, come to see us.

Nancy treasured that letter, but it did not shake her resolve never to put herself in John Grant's way again.

She had never forgotten John, but time helped her to dwell on old memories without bitterness and regret. He was happy; she had helped to make him so. This was always the consoling thought.

That Grant was leaping into greater fame and prominence in the business world she could not help observing. The newspapers were full of him these days.

One night, Doctor Manning was dining with Grant in his New York home.

Toward the end of the dinner John became thoughtful. Up to that point the conversation had been wholly impersonal, but—exactly what brought it

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about he did not know, although he suspected the doctor. Grant found his thoughts drifting to his little son, and by a natural sequence, to his mother and his friends at home—and to Nancy Leigh.

"I have been having so much trouble about nurses, I shall be sending the kiddie home to my mother, I think," he said. Then, with a flush in his face, "Everything is all right again between me and my family," he went on. "Some day soon, doctor, you must meet my mother."

"I shall look forward to that," said Manning. "But about the youngster—let him stay here a little longer. Won't do him any harm. As a matter of fact," he went on hurriedly, as he felt Grant's eyes upon him, "I may have—er—a suitable person to recommend to look after his little majesty!"

"Who?" flashed Grant.

"Ah, it is quite unsettled so far; but let the baby remain for the present, my dear Grant!" was all the doctor would say.

Grant was silent, and a brooding look came into his eyes. He watched the doctor furtively, and when Manning was preening himself that the danger was over, he broke out with what had been in his mind ever since he had poured out his confidences to Nancy's erstwhile employer.

"Have you come across Nancy Leigh, doctor?"

"I have," was the admission.

"And you never told me!" with keen reproof.

"I am sorry, Grant, but I ascertained that Miss Leigh was quite happy and my interest ends at that," was Manning's rejoinder. Then he leaned toward

Grant. "Why do you revive the subject of Miss Leigh?" he went on. "I imagine you have not been in the dark about her all this time?"

Grant admitted this, and was silent for a time. Then, with a deep sigh, he rose from the table to pace slowly to and fro across the thick rugs.

"Perhaps I am unwise, dwelling again on this topic," he said at length. "I have never told you that Nancy was the means of my reconciliation with my mother; that she, in short, opened the door to the past. I did not even have the chance to thank her, however, and Heaven only knows how I feel about her! She has forgotten me by now, but I—I can never, never forget!"

"You are leaving to-night on a business trip, I think," said Manning a moment later, as if in a willful attempt to close the subject of Nancy Leigh. "When will you be back?"

"That is uncertain," said Grant. "Two days, perhaps three or four, for all I know. What does it matter, doctor?"

"It may matter a great deal," said Manning inscrutably. "I want you to return as early as possible. Don't ask me why. I'm a ridiculous fellow at times, you know. But I have an idea that, on this occasion, you should curtail your absence as much as possible. And, by the way," he pursued, as he strode out into the hall with Grant at his heels, "if I should get in touch with the person I referred to, may I instruct her to report here for duty forthwith?"

"Yes, certainly," was Grant's answer. But his thoughts were elsewhere.

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Upon his return home, the doctor chanced to meet Nancy in the hall of the apartment.

"Hello, Miss Leigh!" he said, recalling her. "I have something up my sleeve I want to tell you about." And, as Nancy came to face him, he went on, "I have been dining with our friend, Mr. John Grant."

Nancy looked flushed and startled at the name.

"No, I did not give you away," pursued the doctor.

"How—how is the baby?" asked Nancy suddenly.

"Ah, so you have not forgotten the kiddie, as you pretended?" Manning accused her. "He's fairly well. I should not be surprised, however, if he developed—whooping cough. No, nothing to worry about, I assure you!" Manning found difficulty in going on with such a flagrant deception, since the little John was as well and sturdy as a young lion. "The fact is, Miss Leigh, I should like to see him properly looked after. The next few days might work wonders!"

Nancy's face was a burning crimson.

"I'm afraid, doctor, that I cannot go, if you mean that," she said abruptly.

"Why not?" retorted Manning. "It's only for a day or two, and Grant is leaving town to-night. He need never know. If you realized my anxiety, Miss Leigh, you would not hesitate. Am I to order you to go?"

Nancy was silent, the flush still in her cheeks.

"I shall telephone over in the morning that you are coming," announced Manning.

"Very well," the girl decided, in a low, frightened voice. "I will go, but only for a day or two."

Nancy had no anxieties about John when the second day drew to a close.

She was up in the nursery, bending over the child's cot, when suddenly, into the tenderness of those moments, came the sound of an opening door.

Without rising, she looked round.

John Grant himself was standing before her!

Nancy did not move. Her face went white to the lips.

"I—I'm sorry. I did not expect you back so soon," she contrived to say. "Doctor Manning sent me here to take care of the baby for a little time."

For an instant a smile flitted across John's lips. Manning's little ruse was very clear to him.

He was tongue-tied, his face crimson, as he faced Nancy. She started to go abruptly past him to the door.

"Nancy, wait."

Grant's hand suddenly closed on her arm. His face had become set and white again; for a moment or two he could not go on. Flushed and a shade resentful, Nancy braved his look. Their eyes met.

"Nancy, why be so afraid of me?" said Grant then. His voice trembled, his eyes softened before her gaze and made a yearning appeal.

She hung her head again, her heart racing.

"But I am not afraid of you, John!" she answered.

"Then why run away simply because I have come?"

"I am ashamed. I did not mean you to know I

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was here," she confessed, almost tearfully. "Oh, you can understand! I should not have allowed myself to come. It was wrong!"

"Why should it be wrong or wicked, Nancy? You cannot have forgiven me if you speak like that!"

A twinge of pain crossed his face. He felt that Nancy could never forgive him; it was too much to expect.

His hand still rested restrainingly on her arm. She looked up at him again.

"John, please let me go!" she entreated.

"Not like this, Nancy—never!" was his rejoinder. He became suddenly a little stern. He looked at the sleeping child in the cot, and thought of his mother, now so happy through Nancy's effort.

"Have you really forgiven me?" he went on.

"Do you doubt it, John?" she answered, in a low voice. Then, with another look of entreaty. "Oh, you must know that I am anxious only to see you happy!"

"I have had good evidence of that, Nancy," he told her. "You know that my mother has forgiven me—blotted out the past? They are all happy now, thanks to you!"

"I—I am glad, so glad!"

"But you——"

Their eyes met again.

"I am happy," she tried to tell him.

"Nancy, I cannot let you go!" he was crying suddenly, and for one wild instant his arm locked about her shoulders. "Nancy, can't you see that we

can never, never be happy apart, you and I? I know it, I feel it every moment of the day, and have felt it all these long years! Nancy, my darling, I'd give everything I possess—do anything—only to make amends, to see you happy like the others, forgetting all the wrong I did you!"

"Oh, please, please——" was wrung from the girl. She drew away from him, a frightened look in her eyes, her breath coming in stormy gasps.

"Nancy, I must have my chance!" Grant went on. His arms were stretched out to her. "Don't leave me, Nancy! I couldn't bear it now. I was bad, cruel, but I have been punished. I paid the price! I saw how miserable I made you. My heart cried out, Nancy, and I could never forget. It was all a hideous pretense. Fate keeps driving us together, as it has done again to-night. There's the youngster, too. Can't you see, my darling, how he will need you—how I need you? Nancy, it's not too late. Say it isn't too late!"

Nancy did not answer him. Her eyes were filled with tears, her limbs shaking beneath her. It was as if a wonderful, blinding radiance suddenly filled the room.

Then, her head averted, she saw the little cot with the sleeping child, the child she had promised to care for. Swiftly she sank on her knees beside it, and buried her face in the cool, white linen.

John hesitated only an instant. Then he came up to her and drew her flushed, tearful face up to his own.

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"Nancy, my darling, is it true? We can begin over again?"

He saw the old, tender smile through her tears, and suddenly she was in his arms, her head, with its red-gold halo, sunk against his breast.

THE END

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